









FIVE RUSSIAN PLAYS
WITH ONE FROM THE UKRAINIAN



NICHOLAS EYRÉINOV.

From a Portrait by N. KULBIN.

FIVE RUSSIAN PLAYS

WITH ONE FROM THE
UKRAINIAN

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINALS
WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

Carl E. Bechhofer
C. E. BECHHOFFER *Robert*

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO.

1916

PG 3245
.R6.

235363

16

TC.H 13 Apr 26 CONTENTS

	PAGE
TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION . . .	ix
I. A MERRY DEATH, A HARLEQUINADE, BY NICHOLAS EVRÉINOV . . .	I
II. THE BEAUTIFUL DESPOT, THE LAST ACT OF A DRAMA, BY NICHOLAS EVRÉINOV . .	35
III. THE CHOICE OF A TUTOR, BY DENIS VON VÍZIN	79
IV. THE WEDDING, BY ANTON CHÉHOV . .	101
V. THE JUBILEE, BY ANTON CHÉHOV . .	127
VI. THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY, BY LÉSYA UKRÁINKA	153

INTRODUCTION

THE plays selected for translation in this volume are, for the most part, modern. Von Vízin alone belongs to an earlier date, that of the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless it will be found that they have this in common : they are, while still Russian, at the same time European. This separation of artists into two categories, the national and the European, is quite simple of comprehension. The national author, often the favourite in his own country and one who has strengthened and enriched its language to a great degree, is nevertheless hardly to be appreciated in translation by readers of other European countries. Lomonósov, the " father of the Russian language," poet, panegyrist and critic, is an example ; so is Dr. Johnson. But a European artist can be appreciated by any foreign reader in an adequate translation, that is, a translation approximating to what the author would have written in that language.

Von Vízin, the first real Russian dramatist, comes in the rank of European artists. He is in everything Russian ; his subject, characters and treatment are all Russian, but his plays are written with that " brilliant common-sense " which may be regarded as the characteristic of the European artist. It is well worth pointing out how his work, coming to an end during the first period of the French Revolution, approaches in spirit the work of the other authors in this book, who wrote a round century after him. This phenomenon is similar to much that can be observed not only in Russian art, but in Russian politics and society.

Denis Ivánovich Von Vízin (the name at Pushkin's suggestion was Russianised into " Vonvízin " during the nineteenth century) was descended from a German prisoner of war. He was born in 1745 and educated at first by his father, his gratitude to whom he showed in the characters of Oldthought, in *The Minor*, and Flatternot, in *The Choice of a Tutor*. In 1760, after five years in a preparatory school he became a student at the Moscow University. In the next year he published a book of translations of

Holberg's fables. In 1762 he joined the Imperial Guard, but this life did not please him and he became a translator in the Foreign Office. In 1766 he finished his comedy *The Brigadier*, which was at once greeted as "our first comedy of manners." *The Minor*, written in a similar style round a character resembling Goldsmith's Tony Lumpkin, was produced in 1782. Most of the characteristics of these five-act comedies are to be found in the little farce in this book, *The Choice of a Tutor*, written probably in 1792, the year of Von Vizin's death. A significant event in his life is that in 1774 he drew up a plan of a constitution for Panin, the minister, whose secretary he had become five years before, to present to the Emperor.

This constitution, with a hundred others, had to lie aside for the whole of the nineteenth century, while the political progress of Russia was at a standstill. It is usual to consider this the fault of autocratic emperors, but perhaps it was due to the horror of the nation at the apparition of Napoleon as the result of the French Revolution. It is at least the characteristic of Russian literature after

the first quarter of the nineteenth century that it attempted to withdraw from the course of European progress, and to find a national path instead. The marvellous Dostoiévsky is always exotic to us, so (in a less degree, as his genius was less) is Turgéniev, so is Ostróvsky the dramatist, so are all the Russian authors of the middle and later nineteenth century, until Sáltikov, the satirist, and Chéhov. Griboyédov's comedy *Woe from Wit* (1824), recently translated into English under the title "The Misfortune of Being Clever," was the last of the early Russo-European masterpieces. The reader feels it might have been written less than twenty years ago; in the strict sense of literary chronology, it actually was written twenty years ago.

The function of Anton Pávlovich Chéhov—this transliteration has been preferred to the less correct forms, "Tschekhoff," "Tchekhof," "Chekhof," etc.—has been to pioneer the return of Russian literature into the normal path of European civilization. He was born in 1860, at Taganrog, on the Sea of Azov, the grandson of a serf and the son of a grocer. He was taught Greek at a church school and then

went to the local classical school. His father's little shop came to grief and the whole family moved to Moscow, where he studied medicine at the University. He started writing, often forced to work in one room with his parents and brothers and their friends. In 1884 he qualified as a doctor, and in 1886 published a first book of stories that had already appeared in a score of newspapers and reviews. He practised as a doctor merely on occasion, but was a most prolific writer of stories and plays, in which the influence of French literature, especially de Maupassant, conflicted with the current ultra-nationalism. Some, in fact most, of his work is simply Russian, for example, *The Three Sisters*, of his plays, and *The Duel*, of his stories. At the same time there are innumerable short stories European in style and, among his plays, *The Wedding* and *The Jubilee*, here translated, show the best quality of his work and the service he was rendering Russian literature. His life was cut short by consumption, which forced him to leave the intellectual centres of the north for the warm, barbaric Crimea. In 1890, however, he travelled in Siberia to observe the conditions of the political and

criminal exiles. A complete edition of his works was published in 1903, and in the next year he died quietly at Badenweiler in the Black Forest.

Chéhov is not a great writer ; he is really a great journalist, and his work has no permanent importance. A French critic has compared his work with the cinematograph, he himself called it "sweet lemonade." It was not vodka—there lies its significance. He was an embryo European, peculiarly of France, of the France he had come to know in his profession and his reading. Now that he had led Russian literature out of its purely Russian groove, the natural step was for it to become more and more European, without losing its national impulse. The decadence of such modern writers as Andréyev, Górkí, and Sólogub lies in their refusal to recognise this fact ; they continue to write in a narrow style, dwarfed even in that by the genius of their fore-runners, uninspired by the renaissance of European solidarity that the war has revealed, the spirit that Von Vízin had and Griboyédov.

The first modern Russian author to work in the recovered tradition is Nicholas Evréinov, who is

represented in this book by his own favourite plays *A Merry Death* and *The Beautiful Despot*. He is still a young man, being born on February 13, 1879. He was educated at the aristocratic Imperial School of Law, in Petrograd, and afterwards studied music under Rimsky-Korsákov. The present translator had the pleasure of making his acquaintance at Petrograd last year and was given several volumes of his collected plays and parodies. Evréinov has not only an instinct for drama, but is professionally bound to the theatre, for, in addition to his plays, he is the author of several books on stage-craft. What this means in technique will be seen from *A Merry Death*, a masterpiece both of drama and of the theatre. It is the best Russian play since *Woe from Wit*, and, so European is it, its excellence could be reproduced and appreciated in any country. So far as the more recent works of Evréinov permit us to judge, he is unlikely to excel it in the future.

A word or two may be said of Larissa Petrónna Kossátch (1872-1913), whose pseudonym is "Lésya Ukráinka"—"Lesya of the Ukraine." The same influence that is visible in Chéhov and ripe in

Evréinov has been felt also in the newly revived Ukrainian, or Little Russian, literature. Lésya Ukráinka gave it a depth and wealth of vocabulary it sadly needed and, by introducing the European, has countered the decadent spirit of the ultra-national Ukrainians. *The Babylonian Captivity*, translated as an epilogue to this volume, represents the enslavement of the Ukraine by its powerful neighbours ; but its style is a victory.

The translator is indebted to the Editor of *The New Age* for permission to reprint five of the plays in this volume. The translation of *The Babylonian Captivity* from the Ukrainian is due mainly to Miss Sophie Volska, of Kiev. The translations of Evréinov's two plays, by the way, have his authorisation. In them, as in the others, stage directions have been as far as possible omitted.

C. E. BECHHOFFER,

A MERRY DEATH

A HARLEQUINADE

By NICHOLAS EVRÉINOV

CHARACTERS

HARLEQUIN

COLUMBINE

PIERROT

DOCTOR

DEATH

Scene : Harlequin's House

A MERRY DEATH

(Harlequin is sleeping. Pierrot clumsily chases the flies from his face, then turns to the Audience.)

PIERROT: Shhh! Quiet! Take your seats quietly and try to talk and turn in your seats less. Even if an ingenuous friend has dragged you in and yourselves are too serious to be interested in a harlequinade, it's quite superfluous to hint of it to the public, which in the main has no affair with your personal tastes. Besides, Harlequin's asleep—you see him! Shh! I'll explain it all to you afterwards. But don't wake him up, please! And when Columbine comes on, don't applaud her like mad, just in order to show your neighbours that you know her, had a little intrigue with her, and can appreciate certain talents. I beg and entreat you! It's no joke. Harlequin's terribly ill! Just think, he's been raving about my Columbine, although, of course, there's nothing in common between him and my Columbine; there isn't, because Columbine's my wife, and there's an end of it! I strongly suspect that

Harlequin won't live till to-morrow ; a fortune-teller told him that the day he sleeps longer than he revels he will die exactly at midnight. Look, it's just eight o'clock of the evening, and he's still asleep ! I'll tell you even more—I know, perhaps for sure, that Harlequin will soon die. But what decent actor will tell the audience the end of the play before it begins ? I'm not one of those who give away the management, and I thoroughly understand that the audience goes to the theatre not for any idea in the piece, or masterly dialogue, but simply to know how the play ends, and all the same I can't help sighing and weeping in my long sleeves and saying (*sobs*) : “ Poor, poor Harlequin, who ever could have thought it ? ” I used to like him very much ! He was my first friend ; though, by the way, this never prevented me from envying him a little, because, as everybody knows, if I'm Pierrot, it's only because I'm not a successful Harlequin. However, I'm not as simple as my clothes, and, I assure you, I've managed already to go for a doctor, although it's useless, because Harlequin can die quite all right without a doctor ; but—nice people always do it, and I'm not inferior to

them ; for, if I didn't behave like everybody else, I should be a bold, merry Harlequin, for whom there are no laws ; but I—I'm only silly, cowardly Pierrot, whose character, by the way, will be quite clear to you in the further course of the drama, if only you stop till the end of the performance and don't run away now from my chatter. So I'll stop it, informing you only of the following plan which came into my head entirely without outside influence : if Harlequin is fated to die exactly at midnight by this clock, then won't it be a comradely service on my part to put back the hands, even for—well, only two hours ? I always liked taking people in ; but when it's a matter of taking in death and Harlequin at the same time, and, as well, for the harm of the first and the good of the second, I don't think you can call this plan anything but a genius's. Well, to work ! The performance begins ! (*Climbs on a stool and, stretching over the bed on which Harlequin is sleeping, puts the clock back two hours.*) Poor, poor Harle—— (*Falls down on the floor.*) Poor Pierrot ! (*Rubs his back. Harlequin, waking, smiles, pulls Pierrot towards him by the chin, and tenderly kisses him.*)

PIERROT (*naïvely*) : I seem to have waked you.

HARLEQUIN : Why didn't you do it earlier ?

PIERROT : What for ?

HARLEQUIN : My hours are numbered.

PIERROT : Rubbish !

HARLEQUIN : I want to live them.

PIERROT : And you will.

HARLEQUIN : You nearly let me sleep them away.

PIERROT : I thought——

HARLEQUIN : What's the time ?

PIERROT : Six.

HARLEQUIN : Only.

PIERROT : Yes. How do you feel ?

HARLEQUIN : Dying.

PIERROT : You're frightening me. (*Weeps.*)

HARLEQUIN : Stop ! Why, I'm alive ! What have you done ? Isn't my clock wrong ?

PIERROT : I went for a doctor. Lie down quietly.

I must take your temperature.

HARLEQUIN : For a doctor ? (*Giggles.*) Well, what of it, if he cures me——

PIERROT : Lift up your arm. That's the way.

(*Applies a thermometer.*) Is that someone coming ?

(*The thermometer begins to burn.*)

HARLEQUIN : It shows the exact temperature.

(*Pierrot takes away the thermometer and puts out the flame. Harlequin jumps up and circles about snapping his fingers.*) Haha! Harlequin's not dead yet!

PIERROT: Only a thermometer spoiled.

HARLEQUIN: Yes, I've not long to live; but (*taking down a lute*) look, how many strings are broken and the rest are frayed! But does that stop me playing the introduction to a serenade? (*Plays. Steps are heard to the left.*)

PIERROT: D'you hear? The doctor! Stop playing and lie down quickly. It's he. I can tell people at once by their step. That could only be someone hurrying to help a friend.

HARLEQUIN (*stops playing and lies down*): To get money. (*A knock.*)

PIERROT: Come in!

DOCTOR (*in huge spectacles, bald, with a big red nose and a syringe in a bag, comes in, stops, and sings to the audience*):

You've only got to call me here,
And at once I'm near, at once I'm near,
At once I'm off to the invalid
To care for him and for his need.

My medicines I vary at
The rich man's house and proletariat ;
But there's no need to be obscure,
I only care, but do not cure.

And grind the poor I never did,
O God forbid, O God forbid !
For wealth from him who'd scrape any ?
You take his only ha'penny.
My medicines I vary at
The rich man's house and proletariat ;
But there's no need to be obscure,
I only care but do not cure.

Good-day, my dear Harlequin. What's the matter with you ?

HARLEQUIN : That's for you to judge.

DOCTOR : You're quite right. (*In Pierrot's ear.*)

There's never any need to contradict a patient.

(*To Harlequin.*) Temperature been taken ?

PIERROT (*shaking his hand*) : Don't inquire !

DOCTOR : How do you feel ?

HARLEQUIN : An attack.

DOCTOR : Of coughing ?

HARLEQUIN : Of laughing.

DOCTOR : What are you laughing at ?

HARLEQUIN : You ! (*Bursts with laughter.*)

DOCTOR (*to Pierrot*) : He doesn't believe in medicine ?

PIERROT : No, apparently only in you.

DOCTOR : What a curious invalid ! Your pulse, please. Oho, I can't count quickly enough ! Show your tongue.

HARLEQUIN : To whom ?

DOCTOR : To me !

HARLEQUIN : Oh, to you ? Delighted ! (*Shows his tongue.*)

DOCTOR : Thank you.

HARLEQUIN : Please. (*Shows his tongue again.*)

DOCTOR : Enough, enough !

HARLEQUIN : Oh, that's quite all right ! (*Shows it again.*)

DOCTOR : I've seen it already.

HARLEQUIN : Just as you like. (*Puts in his tongue.*)

DOCTOR : I've got to listen to you.

HARLEQUIN : What shall I talk about ?

DOCTOR : No, I say : I've got to listen to you.

HARLEQUIN : Well, and I ask you, what about ?

DOCTOR : You don't understand me.

HARLEQUIN : You ? No, no, no, never ! People like me can see right through you ; but people

like you, I'll eat my hat, can never understand people like me !

DOCTOR : He's raving. Very well ! Now, allow me to lay my head upon your heart ! It's necessary in order to——

HARLEQUIN : But your wife isn't jealous ?

DOCTOR : He's got a strong fever. If my ears aren't burned, it'll be a piece of luck. Yes, yes, you're very ill ; but let's hope you'll soon be well. (*To Pierrot.*) There's no hope ; the machine is spoiled. (*To Harlequin.*) You'll live a long time yet. (*To Pierrot.*) He'll die very soon. (*To Harlequin.*) You did very well to send for me. (*To Pierrot.*) You'd better have sent for a coffin-maker. (*To Harlequin.*) You've a healthy system. (*To Pierrot.*) And that won't help him. (*To Harlequin.*) You've only got to be cured. (*To Pierrot.*) And that's no use.

HARLEQUIN : What do you advise me ?

DOCTOR : You must go to bed early. No excitements. Drink absolutely nothing. Don't eat anything sharp, salt, fat, spiced, bitter, milky, over-cold, over-hot, very, very sweet, or very, very filling. Quiet habits, mustn't get roused. Always mind draughts. Keep quite away from frivolity.

HARLEQUIN : Very well ; but is a life like that worth living ?

DOCTOR : That's your affair.

HARLEQUIN : What illness have I got ?

DOCTOR : Old age.

HARLEQUIN : Why, I could be your son !

DOCTOR : You're too impudent for that. Good-bye.

(*To Pierrot.*) And who pays for the visit ?

(*Pierrot nods towards Harlequin.*)

DOCTOR (*again to Harlequin*) : Good-bye.

HARLEQUIN : Good-bye. (*Doctor goes out undecidedly and stops.*) Have you forgotten anything ?

DOCTOR : Have *you* forgotten anything ?

HARLEQUIN : No, nothing ; I thoroughly remember all your instructions. Don't be uneasy.

DOCTOR : No, no ; I'm not uneasy about that.

HARLEQUIN : Then about what ?

DOCTOR : H'm. Speaking between ourselves, you've forgotten to pay me for my visit.

HARLEQUIN : Impossible ! How curious !

DOCTOR : But please don't be angry with me.

HARLEQUIN : Good heavens, no !

DOCTOR : Then good-bye.

HARLEQUIN (*shaking his hand feelingly*) : Good-bye, doctor, good-bye.

DOCTOR : H'm. You're just as forgetful again.

HARLEQUIN : Yes, yes. There's a coincidence !

You're quite right. It would be impudent of me to maintain the opposite.

DOCTOR : Well, there you are ; I'm reminding you.

HARLEQUIN : I'm heartily grateful.

DOCTOR : There's no need for gratitude.

HARLEQUIN : No ! Good heavens !

DOCTOR : And so—my fee ?

HARLEQUIN : You'll get it when I get well, when you've cured me.

DOCTOR : Yes ; but I ought to tell you that I reckon to cure all illnesses except the incurable ; but yours——

HARLEQUIN : Well, then, when an improvement comes, when your advice begins to work. But then, who knows ? Perhaps you lied. Why should I pay then ?

DOCTOR : In that case I must inform you that—that, judging from the condition of your system, you won't live even till to-morrow.

HARLEQUIN (*jumping out of bed*) : What ! In that case, why the devil should I pay ?

DOCTOR : But when you die, who'll pay me ?

HARLEQUIN : But for what, let me ask you ?

DOCTOR : How, for what ?

HARLEQUIN : If I actually die to-day, then what's the use of your art that can't save me from death ? And if I survive, then again it's no use, if it knows less than an ignorant fortune-teller.

DOCTOR : I didn't come here to talk philosophy.

HARLEQUIN : I know why you came.

DOCTOR : No insinuations, if you please.

HARLEQUIN : He calls that insinuations. (*Pulling out a purse from under his pillow.*) Here's what you came for. (*Goes to the door and holds out the money.*)

DOCTOR (*reaching out*) : Thank you. (*Harlequin laughs, and runs out at one side and in at the other, the Doctor after him. He does this three times, and then gives the Doctor the money.*)

HARLEQUIN : What do you say to my playfulness ?

DOCTOR : You know, sir—here's the best of luck in the other world—it's the first time I've seen a dying man like you. What's that noise you're making ?

HARLEQUIN : That's my heart beating. (*Noise of a steam-engine.*)

DOCTOR : And that ?

HARLEQUIN : My breathing.

DOCTOR : And you're still on your legs ?

HARLEQUIN : Oh, yes ! And I've kept fairly merry, so as to meet boldly the death I desire.

DOCTOR : Why do you desire it ?

HARLEQUIN : Oh, it's just coming at the right time ! The man that lives wisely always desires his death.

DOCTOR : You're talking in riddles.

HARLEQUIN : Yes, for people like you. (*Laughs.*)

DOCTOR : How do you know ?

HARLEQUIN : If you like, I'll tell you how you'll die.

DOCTOR : Interesting.

HARLEQUIN (*lies on bed and shivers with all his body, then groans*) : Oh ! Ah ! Ugh ! I'm still so young. I haven't been able to live yet as I ought. Why have I been so abstinent all my life ? I've still got all sorts of things I want to do. Turn me to the window. I'm not tired yet of looking at the world. Help ! I've not been able to do half I wanted. I was never in a hurry to live because I always forgot about death. Help, help ! I haven't been able to enjoy myself yet ; I've always kept my health, my strength, and my money for the morrow. I filled it with beautiful hopes, and it rolled on like a snowball, growing

bigger and bigger. Has that morrow rolled for ever beyond the bounds of the possible? It has rolled down the slope of my mortal wisdom. Oh! Ah! Ugh! (*Twists for the last time, extends, and dies. The Doctor weeps. Harlequin, with a laugh, gets up and applauds himself.*) No! Not so dies Harlequin!

DOCTOR (*weeping*): What must I do?

HARLEQUIN (*holds out his hand*): For the advice, please. I take in advance.

DOCTOR: How much?

HARLEQUIN: As much as you.

DOCTOR (*gives back his fee*): Well?

HARLEQUIN (*with importance*): Go and live. Nothing else.

DOCTOR: What does that mean?

HARLEQUIN: Well, if you don't understand, you're incurable. I tell you, go and live, but live, not like an immortal, but like a man that may die to-morrow.

DOCTOR (*shakes his head doubtfully*): H'm. I'll try it. (*Wipes his eyes.*) Good-bye, Mr. Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN: Good-bye, Mr. Doctor. (*Exit Doctor, finger on brow.*) Well, what have you got to say of it, Pierrot?

PIERROT : Nothing good. (*It grows dark.*)

HARLEQUIN : The old ape imagined I don't feel death coming. As if a man, sleeping longer than he revels, could still have doubts about the approach of death. But what's the time? (*The clock shows eight.*) Hasn't the clock stopped? It always went in step with me, but now——

PIERROT : You're too nervous.

HARLEQUIN : We can't all be like you.

PIERROT : What do you mean?

HARLEQUIN : You'll soon see. Help me to lay the table for supper.

PIERROT (*going to the cupboard*) : With great pleasure.

HARLEQUIN : We must lay for three.

PIERROT : Three?

HARLEQUIN : Yes.

PIERROT : Whom's the third for?

HARLEQUIN : For Death.

PIERROT : She'll sit down with us?

HARLEQUIN : If you're not afraid of her.

PIERROT : Two glasses are enough; I won't have supper with you.

HARLEQUIN : Come, come! I was joking. Death will sup on me. That's sufficient for her. But, all the same, lay for three. (*Lights the lamp.*)

PIERROT : But whom's the third for ?

COLUMBINE'S voice (*sings*) :

I from my husband unsuspected
Steal to another 'neath the moon ;
When desire's interdicted,
Doubly 'tis desired soon.
Ah, my heart is trembling,
Fainting, beating slow—
If my spouse should see me,
Should hearken, and should know.

PIERROT : What's that ? Columbine's voice ! My wife's voice !

HARLEQUIN : Now you know whom the third place is for.

PIERROT (*tragically*) : A-ah ! Traitor ! A-ah !
Demon ! This is your friendship !

HARLEQUIN : Be calm. Why, nothing's happened yet !

PIERROT : It only wants that !

HARLEQUIN : And if I were to say that it doesn't even want that ?

PIERROT : And you dare pretend that you love me !

HARLEQUIN : I love you both. But you want it to be only you, and so you're jealous.

PIERROT : You know very well how, of whom, and why I'm jealous.

HARLEQUIN : Be sensible. If you love me and love Columbine, you ought to be happy for both our sakes. Besides, you know we both love you. So what is there to be sad about? Lay a third place.

PIERROT : No, I'm not so simple. Nice people don't behave like that, and there's nothing else left for me than to revenge myself on you.

HARLEQUIN : In what way?

PIERROT : By death.

HARLEQUIN : But it'll come soon anyhow—my hours are numbered. Who will prevent you afterwards from telling everybody that it was the work of your hands?

PIERROT : Suppose——

HARLEQUIN : Come, what is there to talk about ! Lay a third place.

PIERROT (*considering*) : Yes, but——

HARLEQUIN : Come, come. Time's precious. (*Pierrot fetches the plates and drops them.*) Butterfingers ! You were bound to smash 'em.

PIERROT (*pathetically*) : It's not for you to reproach me ! You've destroyed my happiness.

HARLEQUIN (*laying the third place*): No phrases, please! You've been cold with Columbine for a long time, and you're only jealous because it's good manners. But, shh!

COLUMBINE'S voice:

Columbine has donned her mask
And is clad in motley gear, O,
Wants to see her Harlequin
But's afraid of meeting Pierrot.
Ah, her heart is trembling,
Fainting, beating slow—
If her spouse should see her,
Should hearken, and should know.

HARLEQUIN: I'm going to meet Columbine; you look after the lamp. (*Exit.*)

PIERROT: H'm. Look after the lamp! (*Suddenly strikes his forehead.*) Wouldn't it be better to look after the clock? Well, if Harlequin's death ought to be the work of my hands, very well! Ladies and gentlemen, you are my witnesses! I don't leave that sort of things unpunished—I'll put the hands on two hours. (*Does so.*) Ah! Harlequin, evidently no one can escape his fate. Now I'm quite calm: I'm revenged. Interesting

to see how she'll look at me. This way, please, Madame Traitress.

HARLEQUIN (*off*): Don't be afraid, Columbine! Go in fearlessly. I've persuaded him, and, word of honour, he's consented.

COLUMBINE (*enters*): Consented?! Here's a fine thing! Consented! What, you little beast, that's all you think of your wife! You don't care if she betrays you? You don't care? Answer! (*Beats Pierrot.*)

PIERROT (*agonised*): But listen, Columbine.

COLUMBINE: What? I must listen to you? Listen to the worst little beast of a husband of all little beasts of husbands?—

PIERROT: But, Columbine.

COLUMBINE: Blockhead!

PIERROT: You don't let me utter a word.

COLUMBINE (*beats him*): You've got no excuse! And I, poor thing, married a little beast like you! Gave you all the best there was in me! And he can't even stand up for my conjugal honour! Take that, and that, and that, you good-for-nothing!

PIERROT: But that's too much! Harlequin, protect me.

HARLEQUIN : This is your own business.

PIERROT : Yes, but, dear old chap——

HARLEQUIN : I haven't been brought up to interfere in other people's private matters.

COLUMBINE (*to Pierrot*) : There, that's how you love me ! That's how jealous you are of me ! Where are your vows, you pagan ?

PIERROT (*coming to himself*) : Oh, to Hell with this, I never heard of such a thing ! Why, you impudent woman, you came here yourself to a rendezvous and yet you dare say——

COLUMBINE : That's enough ! Be quiet ! I know the little ways of rogues like you : when you're found out you start to find fault with the innocent, so as to get out of the difficulty. But you don't deceive me, you good-for-nothing.

HARLEQUIN (*interposing*) : Friends, don't let's waste precious time ! When supper's waiting, is it worth while spoiling one's appetite ?

COLUMBINE and PIERROT : But it *is* irritating !

HARLEQUIN : I don't like to see quarrels starting.

COLUMBINE and PIERROT : It's not my fault.

HARLEQUIN : Better make friends !

COLUMBINE and PIERROT : Not for anything.

HARLEQUIN : What obstinacy !

COLUMBINE and PIERROT : I've been wounded in my finest feelings.

HARLEQUIN : Come, enough.

COLUMBINE and PIERROT : No.

COLUMBINE : First he ought to be punished.

HARLEQUIN : In what way ?

COLUMBINE : Kiss me, Harlequin ! Dear, sweet Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN : Not to offend you with a refusal—*(kisses her)*. I was always an obliging cavalier. *(Kisses her.)* Besides that, I've got a tender heart. *(Kisses her.)* Even children know it. *(Kisses her.)* And finally, as host—*(kisses her)*—I ought to be polite to my guests—*(kisses her)*—especially when it concerns—*(kisses her)*—the fair sex. *(Kisses her.)*

PIERROT : Wretches ! They don't suspect that I'm already revenged and so can be absolutely calm.

COLUMBINE *(to Harlequin)* : Kiss me more warmly, more strongly, more painfully, almost biting me, without losing breath. *(Is kissed as she desires.)*

PIERROT : They imagine they're mortally provoking me.

COLUMBINE *(to Harlequin)* : Once more ! Once more ! *(To Pierrot.)* Oh ! you unfeeling log !

PIERROT : Please do what you like. (*To Audience.*)

My conscience is clean ; I have vindicated my honour and have nothing to worry about.

COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*) : Kiss my eyes, my forehead, my cheeks, my chin, my temples. (*Harlequin does not wait to be asked a second time.*)

PIERROT (*to Audience*) : Gentlemen, you are witnesses that I've taken my revenge.

COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*) : Kiss my neck where the hair ends and where a sweet shivering comes from your kisses.

PIERROT : I don't care. Let them do as they want. I have fulfilled the duty of an affronted husband and never felt better in my life.

COLUMBINE (*stamping at Pierrot*) : There, you brute ! Is all this nothing to you ?

PIERROT (*to Audience*) : I'm wearing them out with my nonchalance.

COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*) : Well, shall we celebrate our Dance of Love, in spite of him.

HARLEQUIN : I don't dare refuse you, but——

COLUMBINE : What " but " ?

HARLEQUIN : But if Pierrot isn't such a lover of dancing as to forget everything in the world !

PIERROT : Please, don't mind me ? (*To Audience.*)

I'm revenged for everything in advance and needn't be disturbed, whatever happens.

HARLEQUIN (*giving him the lute*): Perhaps you'll accompany us?

COLUMBINE: Of course! Is he to do nothing?

PIERROT: With the greatest pleasure, if it helps you. (*To Audience.*) I hope you understand what a matter of indifference this is to a husband who can vindicate his wounded honour.

COLUMBINE: Play!

PIERROT (*to Audience*): Lord, how easy you are, when you're revenged, and nobody has any right to laugh at you. (*Plays vigorously. Dance. Suddenly Harlequin falls in a faint on the bed. Pierrot stops playing.*)

COLUMBINE: What's happened to you? What's the matter?

HARLEQUIN (*holding his heart*): No—it's nothing, a trifle. (*His heart beats like a sledge-hammer, and he breathes like an engine.*)

COLUMBINE: How furiously your heart's beating! What terrible breathing!

PIERROT (*to Audience, joyfully*): Harlequin's giving in. Harlequin's weakening. Rejoice with me, poor husbands—you whose wives are in danger!

COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*) : Nothing like this has ever happened to you before.

PIERROT (*to Audience*) : By the way, don't be angry with me, because, after all, Harlequin's my friend, and there's an end of it. I'm not going to quarrel with him, indeed, for a harlot ! And if he's more to Columbine's taste than I, he's not to blame, but Columbine, for having such bad taste. By the way, I said this from envy. (*Reflects.*)

HARLEQUIN (*stands up and smiles, and kisses Columbine*) : Come, did I frighten you ? Well, forgive me. (*Looks at the clock, which is nearing twelve.*) Soon you'll know the real reason.

COLUMBINE : What's the matter ?

HARLEQUIN : Let's sit down to supper. The dance woke up my appetite, and I feel magnificent. (*They sit down and eat and drink.*)

COLUMBINE : What are you hiding from me ?

HARLEQUIN : Come, drink, Columbine, drink ! When there's good wine on the table, there's no need to worry about anything. (*Kisses her.*)

PIERROT (*to Audience*) : O Lord, I'm undergoing incredible pangs of conscience. To think only of the harm I've caused Harlequin ! And what for ? What for ? I can't swallow a thing, and I

don't know how to look at Harlequin! I'd willingly confess my wicked crime to him now! But alas! I can't do it, because what would my revenge come to then? And I can't go without revenging myself. I'm a deceived husband, and ought to revenge myself, because all nice people do. Oh, how unhappy I am, and how I want to cry! (*Threatens the audience with his fist.*) Bad, wicked people, it's you thought out such silly rules! It's because of you I've got to take the life of my best friend! (*Turns his back on the public.*)

HARLEQUIN (*to Columbine*): Why were you late to-day?

COLUMBINE: I was detained by the Doctor—I met him quite near here. He was dancing and limping and drunk and accosting all the girls.

HARLEQUIN: Well?

COLUMBINE: He prayed me to make him happy. He assured me that he was very strong and had been very handsome thirty years ago. While I was showing him that I wasn't a historian to be captivated by antiquity, time passed and I was late.

HARLEQUIN (*to Audience*): Poor Doctor! Why didn't he come to me earlier for advice?

COLUMBINE : I was very sorry for him.

HARLEQUIN (*to Audience*) : Your elbow's near and yet you can't bite it !

COLUMBINE : He was weeping and crying : " Why the devil did I preserve my strength ? " And I answered him : " I have respect for your wrinkles, but not passion."

HARLEQUIN : But you know, Columbine, he is younger than I, though twice as old in years.

COLUMBINE : I don't understand you.

HARLEQUIN : Because you haven't meditated on real old age. (*Tapping Pierrot on shoulder.*) But why aren't you drinking or eating and taking part in our conversation ?

COLUMBINE : He wants to depress us, but he shan't, the good-for-nothing !

PIERROT (*weeping*) : You don't understand, poor thing, that Harlequin's dying.

COLUMBINE : Dying ? You horrid thing ! Or have you put poison in our glasses ? No, no (*contemptuously*) ; men like you aren't capable of that.

PIERROT (*all in tears*) : Poor Harlequin, your minutes are numbered !

COLUMBINE : What's he say ? What's he making up ?

HARLEQUIN (*turning to the clock*) : Yes, Columbine, it's true. It's time for you to know it. I feel plainly that I shall soon die.

COLUMBINE : Harlequin ! Beloved !

HARLEQUIN : Don't cry, Columbine ! I shall go away with a smile on my lips. I want to die as people want to sleep, when it's late and they're tired and need rest. I've sung all my songs ! I've revelled all my merriment ! I've laughed all my laughter ! My strength and health have been joyfully spent with my money. I was never mean, and so was always merry and sorrowless. I am Harlequin, and shall die Harlequin. Don't cry, Columbine ! Rather be glad that I'm dying, not like others, but full of delight, content with fate and my conduct. Or would you rather see me grappling to life with greedy eyes and a prayer on my lips ? No, Harlequin is not like that. He has fulfilled his mission in life and dies calmly. And, really, didn't I give my kisses to who wanted them ? Didn't I lavish my soul for the good of others ? How many wives of ugly husbands I consoled ! And how many little hats did I make for people who thought themselves sages ! How many I awoke to passionate song or

rattling rage ! To how many I gave an example ! Now I have outlived my life, and only the husk is left for death ! “ Catch the moments ”—that’s my motto ! And I have not been idle to catch them ! I’ve caught so many that I want no more. Now, perhaps, another kiss, a little draught of wine, a burst of merry laughter—and it will be !

COLUMBINE : But aren’t you afraid ?

HARLEQUIN : It would be more frightful to be born !

Now I’m going back again.

COLUMBINE : To sink into nothing !

HARLEQUIN : But if death’s nothing, *what* have I to fear ?

COLUMBINE : Anyhow, I’m afraid.

HARLEQUIN : Your bowl’s not emptied ; you’re afraid not to be ready.

COLUMBINE : But only think——

HARLEQUIN : It thinks for us.

COLUMBINE : But we ?

HARLEQUIN : We’ll remember the march of the clock—the swift march of the clock ! Stretch out, Columbine ! Press the clusters of life ! Turn them to wine ! Don’t tarry for delight, so as to be sated when death comes ! (*Takes the lute.*)

And you, too, stretch out, friend Pierrot, if only you can. (*Pierrot, in reply, sobs. Harlequin laughs.*) No, no, not like that ; you don't understand me.

PIERROT : The lamp's flickering.

HARLEQUIN : And there's no oil in the house.

COLUMBINE : But look, it's still burning !

HARLEQUIN : It's burning, Columbine, burning !

(*Begins to play. The strings break.*)

COLUMBINE (*sorrowfully*) : The strings have broken.

HARLEQUIN (*laughs*) : My catch is sung. (*A knock.*)

Who's there ? (*Death enters. Harlequin rises to meet her. He is very gallant.*) To do justice, madame, you have come just in time. We were only just talking about you. Really, how obliging you are, not to keep yourself waiting ! But why these tragic gestures ? Look round, madame ; you are in the house of Harlequin, where one can laugh at all that's tragic, not even excluding your gestures. (*Death points at the clock with a theatrical gesture.*) Enough, enough, madame. Really, if I hadn't laughed all my laughter, I should burst of laughing in the literal sense of the word. What, you want to stop the clock ? There's plenty of time, madame. As far as I know, my hour has

not yet struck. Or you're anticipating a struggle with me? No, no; I don't belong to the silly bourgeois boors. Honour and place to a beautiful lady! I don't want to cross her, and then I can't oppose her, because I've used up all my strength. But the traditional dance? Your dance of the good old times, when people hadn't yet forgotten how to die, and even Death was a distraction for them. If you please! Ah, you're surprised at the request! Yes, yes, Harlequin in our time is almost a fossil. Well, fair lady, enough obstinacy. (*Music. Death dances.*) Columbine, Pierrot, open your eyes, open them quickly! Look how merry we are! (*Harlequin makes Columbine sit down beside him on the bed. Death places her hand on his shoulder. To Death.*) Wait, my dear lady, wait. Let me take leave of the world as the world does! One more, only one more kiss, Columbine! Pierrot, where have you got to, you coward? (*Rises.*) Well, if you're too lazy to light me. (*Gives the lamp to Death.*) Light the way, Death; there's still a tiny drop of oil in the lamp. (*Death separates him from Columbine.*)

COLUMBINE (*as in a dream*): My Harlequin! My beloved! (*The lamp goes out. Then the moon*

lights up the stage. It is twelve o'clock. Columbine is kneeling at Harlequin's death-bed. Pierrot comes in on the right.)

PIERROT (*to Audience*) : Here's a situation. I really don't know what I ought to bewail first : the loss of Harlequin, the loss of Columbine, my own bitter lot or yours, dear audience, who have witnessed the performance of such an unserious author. And what did he want to say in his piece?—I don't understand. By the way, I'm silly, cowardly Pierrot, and it's not for me to criticise the piece in which I played an unenviable rôle. But your astonishment will increase still more when you know what I have been told to say in conclusion by the culprit of this—well, between ourselves—this strange mockery of the public. Shhh ! Listen ! “ When the genius Rabelais was dying, the monks collected round his couch and tried in every way to induce him to do penance for his sins. Rabelais, in reply, only smiled, and when the moment of the end came, he said mockingly : ‘ Let down the curtain ; the farce is over.’ He said this and died.” Why the graceless author thought it necessary to put other people's words into the mouth of

one of the actors, I don't know—I've not a free hand in the matter ; but being a respectable actor, I stand by him to the last and so, obeying without dispute the will of the author, I shout mockingly : Let down the curtain ; the farce is over. (*The curtains fall behind him.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I forgot to tell you that neither your applause nor your hissing of the piece is likely to be taken seriously by the author, who preaches that nothing in life is worth taking seriously. And I suggest that if truth is on his side, then you should hardly take his play seriously, all the more as Harlequin has probably risen from his death-bed already, and, perhaps, is already tidying himself in anticipation of a call, because, say what you like, but the actors can't be responsible for the free-thinking of the author. (*Exit.*)

(CURTAIN)

THE BEAUTIFUL DESPOT

THE LAST ACT OF A DRAMA

BY NICHOLAS EVRÉINOV

CHARACTERS

THE MASTER,
and his
COMPANION,
FRIEND,
MAID,
MANSERVANT,
FOOL-HERMAPHRODITE,
ARAB BOY and
FAVOURITE WITCH.

THE BEAUTIFUL DESPOT

(The play takes place in the late autumn of 1904. The room luxuriously furnished in the style of a century before. The Master of the house, his Lady Companion, Manservant and Fool-Hermaphrodite with a monkey. All are dressed in antique style.)

SERVANT (*with animation*) : "Tally-ho ! Tally-ho ! Hark ! Follow, follow !" The hounds were at their last gasp. They were only a length behind him. Now they've got him, thought I——No ! the little lord held out another ten minutes—he doubled, the ragamuffin, and doubled again, and again—at last the whip was going to turn the pack back !—Aha ! just look !—I can't describe it !—its tongue hanging out, its eyes bulging.—What a beauty, just—"On him," we shouted. "Tally-ho ! Tally-ho ! There he goes, here he goes, this way, that way." "No, no,

you've gone enough!" Within a minute he was done for.—How his brush trailed. The dear old chap was done for, the old fellow was done.

MASTER: Good work, begad.

SERVANT: Ay, I dare swear there's no sport in the world to beat fox-hunting, nothing!

MASTER: No, Egórich, give things their due. For instance, I'm extraordinarily pleased with to-day's sport. Not even God knows how many brace I shot, but there were some moments that—— (*Kisses the tips of his fingers.*)

COMPANION: Who said that hunting was a cruel pastime?

SERVANT: Some jealous beast who can't shoot or can't afford a gun! (*Laughs.*)

FOOL (*in motley, screams like a monkey*): Kiriki, kirikoo, kiriki.

MASTER (*drinking*): Impeaching human happiness—that's real cruelty. Ahem! I've dined well to-day. (*To Servant.*) My compliments to your wife; to-day's dinner was excellent. I'm not calling her up to compliment her, from consideration for her corns. But how's Diana?

COMPANION: I heard her howling.

SERVANT: Yes, I gave her another bath with bran

and rubbed her belly with camphorated oil ; but you'll have to bleed her, as sure as life. (*Maid brings in a long lit tobacco-pipe.*)

COMPANION (*beckoning at Fool with a biscuit*) :
Chick, chick, chick, chick.

MASTER : Poor little doggie ! However could it have happened ? (*Smokes. Fool scrambles up to Companion, who pulls his ear.*)

COMPANION : Ah, you good-for-nothing. You like to play cards, but you don't like to be smacked for forfeits. Where did you run away to when you lost ? (*Fool squeals.*) I'll show you ! I'll show you ! I'll show you !

FOOL : I'll set the house on fire ! I'll set the house on fire ! (*Runs after Maid and pulls her braids.*)
Bom ! Bom-bom-bom ! Bom-bom-bom-bom !

MAID : Let go ! Let go, you nasty thing ! D'you hear, let go ! Egórich, take him away.

FOOL : I'm ringing the alarm. Fire ! We're alight ! Bom - bom - bom - bom ! Bom - bom - bom - bom ! (*Exit Maid. Servant beats him.*) Tt, you ! One foot in the grave, and still fighting ! (*Goes back to his monkey.*)

COMPANION : But what if he really does set the house on fire ? What will happen ?

MASTER: Well, the stables will be burned too.
They're so near the house. (*Smiles. To Fool.*)
True, fool?

FOOL: A true fool!

MASTER: Yes, I really am. To be the owner of
estates with such a fine chase, and instead of
shooting and enjoying myself in the open air——

SERVANT: How often didn't I say to you in the
town: the woodcock are dull without you, the
wolves run about in the garden in the daytime,
everyone says, "Where's master?"

MASTER: Don't tell me; I'm laughing at myself.

SERVANT: And you didn't want to know; you used
to sit with those long-haired people, you used to
write books for them, you were getting pale and
thin——

COMPANION: Next time I'll go hunting too! My
costume's been repaired.

SERVANT: I can understand those long-haired
vagabonds writing books; they haven't got
estates or health, and the colour of their faces
isn't worth spoiling. But you're a rich gentle-
man, such a gentleman, that your little toe would
show you were a gentleman, and then all of a
sudden——

MASTER : Ah ! when you were speaking the truth,
I was full of prejudices——

SERVANT : Only to think how much time you
wasted for nothing——

MASTER : Nearly all my youth——

COMPANION : But who said he wasn't going to talk
of the past ? There's firm determination ! In-
stead of sad recollections, Egórich, you'd much
better tell us how his grandfather drove out in
the coach with girls for horses. But in detail.
I and Grusha intend to take him out the same
way.

SERVANT : Ah, young lady ! That's impossible !
There are no girls now like there used to be.
Are there ? Can you see them now with blood
as thick as milk, and strong as horses, and such
teeth—oh ! it used to hurt to look at them, they
glistened so. And their calves were burnt like
your iron and their braids were like whips ! Oho,
young lady, those times have gone, there are no
more pretty girls like there used to be.

COMPANION : Come, tell us how it used to be.

MAID (*enters*) : The witch has come. Is she to wait ?

MASTER : No, no, call her in at once, call the dear
old lady in.

SERVANT : May I clear ?

MASTER : Yes, and bring in the candelabra.

SERVANT : Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

FOOL (*plays with monkey*) : Kiriki, kirikoo, kirikoo.

COMPANION : How soon it gets dark now !

MASTER : Well, shall we take her potions and fly to the Brocken.

COMPANION : I'm afraid only it might upset your health.

MASTER : What nonsense ! In the first place (*points at Fool*) he dreamed I was so well, and in the second, what's health ? Isn't it money to be spent neither too stingily nor too prodigally ?

COMPANION : I don't know why, but you're in a reasoning mood to-day. But we must ask the witch about his dream. (*Enter Servant with candelabra.*) Where's the Arab boy gone to ?

SERVANT : He's sitting with Diana ; they're both black and miserable.

MAID (*enters*) : She's coming !

MASTER : Aha.

MAID : Now then, limp up. (*Enter Witch.*)

{ MASTER : Ah ! good day, my dear.

{ COMPANION : Good-day, beauty.

MASTER : Your ugliness gets more beautiful every day.

COMPANION : Will you be a hundred years old the day after to-morrow ?

SERVANT : What ? Has she been merry-making all this time ?

MASTER : Still the same success with the goats ? Ah, the rogue knows how to make her warts suit her face. She knows the scents that please the long tails.

MAID : Why don't you speak, you stockfish ?

COMPANION : She's collecting herself.

MAID (*holds a live log under the witch's nose*) : What's it smell of ? Eh ? What's it smell of ? (*Witch hisses. All laugh.*) What, don't you like it, you big-faced sorceress ?

MASTER : Listen, you rogue. Last night our fool had a quite extraordinary dream. First he dreamed that he, a fool, had been appointed to a terribly responsible post. Well, so far there's nothing extraordinary, that happens all round us every day, but after that—— (*The Arab boy enters with a card on a silver tray. General consternation.*)

MASTER (*astonished*) : Well, this is the last thing I

expected. (*Pause.*) Egórich, go and ask him into the hall. (*Exit Servant.*) What the—I'm in my dressing-gown.—Here's a surprise!

COMPANION : Whoever is it ? (*Looks at card.*) Oh, it's the man who was exiled ?

MASTER : Yes, who'd have thought of him ? (*To Witch.*) My dear, go to the kitchen for a little while !

COMPANION : Interesting to know what he wants ? Why ever has he come all this way ? Why, isn't he a famous writer now ? (*Exeunt Witch, Arab boy, and Maid.*)

MASTER : And a famous man of learning.

COMPANION : Well, he's not got such a wonderful mind, so I heard.

MASTER : But he's got something. He preferred martyrdom for an idea to any kind of jobbery, and consequently——

COMPANION : And you'll receive this adventurer ?

MASTER : I want to be polite, and besides, he's better than the others.

COMPANION : But how are we to behave with him ?

MASTER : To change would be obviously too great an honour for such a gentleman. The year 1808 will continue ; guests have come—and I'll put

on my uniform. That's what my great-grandfather would have done.

COMPANION : He'll destroy all the illusion.

MASTER : All ? He's not so strong as that.

SERVANT (*enters*) : The gentleman says he's frozen from the journey.

MASTER : Ask him in here. There's a fire here. Have the candles lit on the walls, and come and help me dress. (*Exit.*)

SERVANT : Very good, sir. (*At the door Maid runs into him.*) What the devil have they all lost their heads about ? (*Exit.*)

MAID (*to Companion*) : What shall we do ?

COMPANION : Everything's to be as it was ; to-day's the second of October, 1808, and you and I are just his slaves. Although he's so tired, he's gone to put on his uniform. If we don't earn his approval, well,—why, he makes less of us every day.

MAID : Oh, but don't you like that ?——

COMPANION : Light the room up more.

MAID : I'm so excited. I'm burning all over.

COMPANION : Try some cold water. (*Exit.*)

FOOL : We're on fire ? Water ! Water ! (*Enter*

Friend of Master, in normal twentieth-century clothes, with spectacles, followed by Servant.)

FRIEND: I should, er—I don't know—if I could brush myself a little—to tell the truth—the dirt of the railway—it's the worst thing on earth——

SERVANT: You can get warm here by the stove and have a brush down. Grusha, bring a brush.

FRIEND: What a long way you are from the station! How's the master, is he well?

SERVANT: Oh yes. Did you get good horses, if I might ask?

FRIEND (*looking round amazed*): Er, yes, not bad.

SERVANT: The girl will brush you, but master's calling me. Grusha, do it properly! (*Exit.*)

FRIEND (*moving away from the monkey*): It, er—doesn't bite?

MAID: It doesn't bite its friends.

FRIEND: But strangers?

MAID: Strangers don't come here.

FRIEND: Don't come here? But, er—your master, is he, er—absolutely well?

MAID: Yes, absolutely.

FRIEND: Lucky the monkey isn't free!

MAID: Goodness gracious, why, nobody's free at master's.

FOOL (*approaches*) : Who are you ?

FRIEND : And who are you ?

FOOL (*importantly*) : I'm Johnny Cracken and Jenny Jolly, but what's your name ?

FRIEND (*hiding his confusion*) : I'm called Vanya at home. (*Laughs awkwardly.*)

FOOL : What's the joke ? (*To Maid.*) What's he laughing at ? (*To Monkey.*) What's he laughing at ? Let's leave the sinner. (*Exit.*)

FRIEND (*pale*) : Who's that ?

MAID : He told you : Johnny Cracken and Jenny Jolly.

FRIEND : Er—is your master really quite well ?

MAID : Oh yes. He's just coming. (*Pause.*)

FRIEND : I should like to know—how many miles is it from here to the railway ?

MAID (*astonished*) : To the railway ? What's the railway ?

FRIEND : You don't know what a railway is ?

MAID : I've never heard of one.

FRIEND : Do you mean to say—do you—well yes, er—do you all live here, without ever going outside ?

MAID : Yes, without going outside.

FRIEND : Hm.—Your face seems familiar.

MAID : I've never seen you before. I think you're here the first time——

FRIEND : I can't quite recall where—but still—I don't know, perhaps I'm mistaken. (*Picks up book and reads*) : " The Political, Statistical, and Geographical Journal ; or, The Contemporary History of the World. 1808. Third part. Third book. September."—(*Picks up another.*)—" The Genius of the Times," 1808.—" St. Petersburg Review "—" Northern Mercury "—all September, 1808.—Tell me, that is, er, tell me, what are these papers, old ones ?

MAID : I don't know ; we don't know anything about those things. (*Lights the last candles.*)

FRIEND : I don't understand what sort of candles these are. They're funny.

MAID : Funny ? They're the best sort of tallow.

FRIEND : Tallow ? Listen. What does this all mean ? Come, I entreat you, tell me what it's all about ? My head's going round.—Oh ! Why, you're Baroness Nordman, or I've gone mad, or I've got hallucinations, or I'm dreaming !

MAID : But, sir !——

FRIEND : You're Baroness Nordman, whom I met only a year ago at the Sociological Society !

MAID : But, sir !——

FRIEND : I've no more doubts. You're Helen,
Baroness Nordman.

MAID (*withdrawing*) : Lord preserve us ! What are
you talking about, sir ? I'm a serf, a chamber-
maid, my name's Grusha, I wash the floor.

FRIEND : A serf ? (*Pause.*) But serfdom was
abolished in 1861 !!!

MAID : Lord preserve us ! Why it's only 1808 now !

FRIEND : What ? !! (*Enter Master. Exit Maid.*)

MASTER (*in old-fashioned uniform*) : Good-day—
whatever's the matter ?

FRIEND : What does all this mean ? I entreat you,
in the name of God, tell me what it all means ?
Oh ! Oh ! my heart ! Water ! Water !

FOOL (*entering with Companion*) : Water ! Water !
Fire !

MASTER : Are you ill ? What has happened ?

FRIEND : Spray me with water ! Pinch me as
hard as you can, because I'm fast asleep, I'm
frightened and I can't wake up. Wake me up !
This is hellish ! Or have I got hallucinations ? !!
(*More quietly.*) I've been travelling two days in
the train and almost a whole day in the carriage.
If you're trying to hoax me, it's not at all nice of

you : I've got neurasthenia and a weak heart.— I can't make out anything. I met an awful old woman with a beard. After her came a black boy. An angry fool made a laughing-stock of me, then a serf baroness, I mean—— No, I ! I—— (*Shouts.*) But explain it once for all ! Why, it's not like anything on earth. Did they really tell me the truth in Petersburg ; have you really gone mad ?

MASTER : You weren't afraid to visit a madman ?
Why are you afraid now ?

FRIEND : I—I'm not really afraid, but—I've only lost my bearings—I see that you're not mad, but at the same time—— Come, don't torment me any longer ! Enough ! Why, it's getting cruel. I'm dog tired ! Come, explain things to me, quickly.

FOOL (*enters*) : Here's water ! Who wants water ?
(*All but Friend and Fool laugh.*)

FRIEND : Allow me to introduce you : my " God's fool," from the next village.

FOOL : I'm Johnny Cracken and Jenny Jolly.

MASTER : They call him Androgyne there, on irrefutable grounds, that's to say, he's bisexual.

FRIEND : Lo—o—ord !!!

MASTER : And if I wanted to moralise upon every possible occasion I should say at once that you contemporary young people, whose men are full of effeminacy and women of masculinity, might all be called hermaphrodites.

FRIEND : You say, " You contemporary young people," but what are you ?

MASTER : I ? My costume, my toilet, all my appearance, don't they tell you in what epoch I'm living ? And this furniture, this illumination, these people !

FRIEND : If I'm not mistaken—it's as they used to live a hundred years ago.

MASTER : You're not mistaken.

FRIEND : Then—why are you—you—I don't know why, but I'm afraid somehow, though it makes me seem a coward. I don't understand, you prefer this—obsolete way of life to our modern——

MASTER : That's all.

FRIEND : But what's the reason ?

COMPANION (*smiles*) : It's a curious one.

MASTER : There are several.

FRIEND : Tell me just one !

MASTER (*takes out an old book*) : These old notebooks !

FRIEND : What are they ?

MASTER : The diary of my great-grandfather.

FRIEND : What an antiquity !

MASTER : It has enchanted me.

FRIEND : The antiquity ?

MASTER : I was enchanted by his old masterly way of life, beautiful, merry ; d'you understand, it enchanted me ? And to reproduce it even approximately became my sacred dream.

FRIEND : You were always a dreamer.

MASTER : Look ! the dream has come true ! I live where he lived, in the same apartments, with the same habits. I took these girls—come nearer, Grusha !—these dear girls as slaves, and then there's Egórich——

FRIEND : What an extraordinary likeness to Baroness Nordman !

MASTER : That poor woman died recently.

FRIEND : Really ? How sad ! She was a truly advanced woman. The feminist movement lost much by her death. Lord ! how fervently she insisted upon equal rights with men !

MASTER : And how terribly her soul wished to tremble before a man's strength ! Know this—she was a real woman. She sought her ravisher,

her oppressor, her master. She was decaying in the atmosphere of equal rights, she was freezing in the embraces of the manikin who nourished her so much and so convincingly with the beauties of free love.

FRIEND : What are you saying ? ! Where did you get that from ? !

MASTER : Baroness Nordman, that very Baroness Nordman who was tired of living satiated by the advantages of civilization, who was ready for anything to be saved from mortal ennui—she died, and changed into my slave.

FRIEND : Into a slave ? ! ! You're raving !

MASTER : Grusha, kiss the gentleman's hand. (*Maid takes Friend's hand, he tears it away.*)

FRIEND : I don't understand why you're hoaxing me.

MASTER (*to Maid*) : Be off ! (*Exit Maid.*) We're not hoaxing you at all. (*Turns to Companion.*) She's my slave, too, but more intimate.

COMPANION : I am very glad to meet you ; I have heard so much of your services to learning.

FRIEND : Oh, really—thank you——

MASTER : You think there are few women who are stifled by the burden of their freedom ! And so

you don't want to admit that such women, from aversion to your cultured life, from love of the unusual, and from love, of course, of me, are able to become slaves ! I'll show you afterwards the vows they've sworn.

FRIEND : Nothing could surprise me now.

MASTER : Why should it ?

FRIEND : What ? !!

MASTER (*reproachfully*) : You only just said that nothing could surprise you now. (*All laugh.*) But do you recognise Egórich ? My good old servant ? I don't remember if I told you that he and his wife—she cooks for us here—took up a somewhat original position in regard to a certain reform.

FRIEND : How ?——

MASTER : They declared that this reform could not affect such faithful servants as they, and despite everything they went on living with us in the old way. (*Servant kisses his hand.*) He is the right hand of my estate here. And what a hunter—it's simply amazing ! Did you ever hear of hunting with alauntis, bandogs and bercelets ?

FRIEND : Whatever are they ?

MASTER : There you are ! (*To Servant.*) Order your old woman to cook something good for

supper ; and bring us at once a bottle of mead and a plate of comfits.

SERVANT : Very good, sir. Shall I lay the table in the dining-room or——

MASTER : In the dining-room. (*Exit Servant.*) But why are you standing up, dear old chap. Please sit down.

FRIEND (*sarcastically*) : I didn't dare—you're so majestic. (*They sit down.*)

MASTER (*joking*) : Never mind ! Be brave, be brave !

FRIEND : So we're living now in eighteen hundred and——

COMPANION : In eighteen hundred and eight.

MASTER : That is when my great-grandfather was just the age I am now, when he had retired from his regiment and lived, as he said, “ in the gentle calm of my country paradise.”

FRIEND (*sarcastically*) : So you, our matchless economist, the pride of our society, shining, as it were, like a star in the dark night of our social life, you have gone back to the Dark Ages, to the epoch of tyranny, to the time *plusquamperfectum* only because the life of your great-grandfather has exercised an irresistible influence over you ?

MASTER (*seriously*) : That was one of the reasons.

The seed fell on prepared soil. There had always dwelt in me the despot side by side with the liberal.

FRIEND : And they lived together.

MASTER : For a certain time.

FRIEND : That's interesting.

MASTER (*to his Companion*) : Tell him the tale, how two dwelled in one soul.

FRIEND : Whose is this tale ?

MASTER : Mine. She learns my works by heart ; she says she is ready to put them to music, to illuminate them in colours, to mould their ideas in clay, to write them out a thousand times in golden ink. (*Servant brings in a bottle of mead.*) Well, begin !

COMPANION (*at the harp*) : There, where is so much filth and so much serene divinity, where often the very demon builds a nest and where sometimes the seraphim fly, where is preserved so much secrecy, potentiality, and marvellous power, there, in one of these wondrous abodes built, as they all are, for one, only for one—lived two. One was—(Heavens ! how unpleasant to speak

of those you hate)—one was good, learned, diligent. The other was—(how I adore him !)—the other was evil, all-evil and unlearned and lazy. They were crowded, of course, but—Fate did not let them live apart. They wanted to develop, but each was a huge hindrance to the other. And the one that passed for learned and good and diligent drugged the other with the potion of science ; sat at his bedside and sang this lullaby : “ Sleep, dear master : sleep, covering over your eyes ! Your glorious age is past ! Sleep ; the golden age is past ! Now we only mock your noble mien. We need learning and work. The polish of the grandee does not tempt us : the fair ladies are ever less and less that count a well-kept above a horny hand.”—So sang he that was learned and closed the beautiful eyelids of him that was unlearned with irresistible sleep. Only he did not reign long, not long did he rule. It is hard to break a master’s strength, real strength, even with a drowsy poison. One ! and he suddenly awoke.—Two ! he stretched agreeably.—Three ! and from laziness he had already forgotten to think. “ No,” he cried, “ it shall not be as you wish ! I will hear no more

fables, brother! It will be difficult to drug me now. Well, come and let us measure our strength. Enough! We cannot live here together as we used to. Do you hear! You have diverted yourself enough, my beloved." Thereupon he that was learned produced one thousand five hundred arguments. He that was ignorant overcame them at once by mere force of will: he took his rival by the throat, gave him a trifle with two fingers, cast him out of the doors of the sanctuary and began to live alone, his own master. That's all the story, but you may think out the moral yourself, if the story pleased you and you fully understood it.

FRIEND: H'm.—Well—it's very amusing. (*Laughs.*) It's very amusing. The chief contributor to the "Lever" writes stories like this! No, it's so amusing, so amusing that—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

MASTER (*drinking a beaker of mead*): Very glad to have cheered you up. But how nervy you are; you must be working a lot. Why precisely did you come to see me?

FRIEND: Well, in my sweet ignorance I presumed that—I don't understand, didn't you get any of my letters?

MASTER: I don't want to have anything in common with the twentieth century. No one dares bring letters to me. That's my command.

FRIEND: Wise command! But I wrote to you, and, at the editor's instructions, have even journeyed here to ask, persuade, entreat you even in God's name to write just a little article for us. Really, jokes aside, doesn't your conscience torture you? The editor is simply besieged with letters, "Why doesn't he write?"—"Is it true that he doesn't contribute any more?"—"Where are the articles you promised by him?" Listen! Now, really, give up this caprice! Write just a few lines. The paper will fall to pieces without you—you know it well.

MASTER: Please drink.

FRIEND: Come, answer me plainly. (*Drinks a goblet of mead.*)

MASTER: Excellent; I'll send you a few articles; only I don't know if they'll suit a paper with Liberal tendencies. The first article is called, "The Positive Values of Serfdom." The second——

FRIEND: You want to laugh again.

MASTER: On the contrary, I want you to laugh. (*Picking up a paper.*) To tell the truth, a better reply to your remark would be the following passage from "A New Catechism of French Literature." Here it is. It's a question of paper-soiling. Listen, what the use is of paper-soiling: "The flourishing condition of paper manufacturers, printers, and booksellers, the diversion of others, the nourishment of one's own spirit, which almost unceasingly languishes with a thirst for instruction and the acquirement of glory." Of course, you'll say that what was written in 1808, can have no significance to the twentieth century, but I——

FRIEND: You're not really interested in these old things?

MASTER: Old things? A paper for September, 1808, to be called old! (*To Companion.*) Well, I never! (*To Friend.*) Ah, if you only knew how every novelty excites us, every event of passing life! Why, not long ago a meeting took place between the Emperor Alexander and Napoleon. Would you believe it, our hands shook when we learned what was happening? Just listen. (*Reads.*) "We speak of the meeting

of these Monarchs first as of a splendid event in history, of a meeting which, under all the circumstances, is bound to have the most far-reaching consequences.”—D’you hear !—“ The most far-reaching consequences.”

FRIEND (*takes the paper and reads*) : “ The Political, Statistical, and Geographical——” Oh, the devil !

MASTER : It’s our favourite paper.

FRIEND : It’s simply incredible. What did you say——“ The Positive Values of Serfdom ” ?

MASTER : Yes. (*Pours him out mead.*)

FRIEND : So you seriously advocate serfdom ?
Thanks, enough ; this stuff’s very strong.

MASTER : So I seriously advocate serfdom ! (*Pours out for Companion and self.*) It’s strong only for the weak.

FRIEND : And *you* say this ?

MASTER : I am repenting—I had erred. You see, I’m not a god.

COMPANION (*with energy*) : You *are* a god !

MASTER : Not in that sense. You ask for my articles, but that part of me lost its belief in social ideals and died of sorrow. It gave up its place to a despot !

COMPANION : To a beautiful despot !

MASTER : And this despot has the audacity to affirm that most people are fools and rogues. To give them the freedom of which you sing : first, there's no reason for it ; and secondly, it's harmful, because these gentlemen even in bonds are sufficiently dangerous to each other, and in their own interests, that is, in the interests of the majority, their freedom is undesirable. And as Liberals ought to conform in all things with the interests of the majority, so—— (*All laugh.*) Why, you value everything from the point of view of justice and utility. Well, there you are : from the point of view of justice—there's no reason for it, and from the point of view of utility—it's harmful.

FRIEND (*laughs*) : Excellent sophistry !

MASTER : All the more as I acknowledge as right neither the point of view of justice nor the point of view of utility. The point of view of beauty, of pleasure—that's how I regard it.

FRIEND : But, my dear old chap, if——

MASTER : Come, don't let's quarrel.

FRIEND : Is modern culture really so non-existent ?
Have you really turned your back on it ?

MASTER: Modern culture!—H'm. Modern culture! Gad, those damned words turn my hands into fists! I want to roar with rage, I—I want to throw the chairs about. Have you not noticed how this “modern culture,” how it’s destroying beauty? Can you really look on calmly while it prefers the practicability of speech to its imagery, the colourless costume to the picturesque, while it destroy ceremonies, visits, low bows. In wondrous flowery glades it builds black, smoky masses, leads handsome peasants there and changes their marvellous song into a vicious catch!—Besides, contrasts are necessary for beauty! Why, it’s awful if——

FRIEND: But, my dear fellow——

MASTER: And you still want to say that you love beauty in all things. Have shame! The savage has more æsthetic understanding. It’s all over. There will be none rich beyond words, none poor beyond words. Venal love, interested crimes, extravagant Yankee millionaires, ravings about gain, picturesque ragamuffins, all that which is so interesting, and gives such beautiful variety to our life, all is falling into dust, all, all!—It’s interesting just to think what contemporary

subjects there will be for the artist. Even war, even that beautiful calamity is swept away with the "no" of modern culture. Oh, this "modern culture"! You can't imagine a better nursery of vulgarity. It is pitiless to all that is most beautiful. Why, the picturesque little corners of the globe, even they are spoiled with restaurants! Believe me, there will come an hour when Americanism, that ideal incarnation of vulgarity, will catch up in its paws the last poetical little spot of our much-enduring planet and then——

FRIEND: And then?

MASTER: The death of art—the decadence of decadence—the empire of the machine—the grandiose factory, and before it an American, in a humble pose and boots he cleans himself——

FRIEND: H'm—the death of art. Therefore all manifestations of culture should be annihilated, eh? We ought to look to the Vandals? Have I understood you properly?

MASTER: My dear old fellow, in the matter of knowledge of the truth, we people of the twentieth century are not so very far from the Vandals, but in the matter of destroying all that is most beautiful, all that most adorns life, we have

surpassed the Vandals without doubt : beautiful religion, omnipotent knowledge, pleasurable ethics, we laugh at all these, make nothings of them and—and our soul, frightened and sad, is ready to throw us into acid, into the bed of corruption, under the wheels of a locomotive, if only it could stifle in itself the consciousness of this inexpressible horror. You understand how greatly a man must suffer for whom God has ceased to exist, but in whom the religious feeling remains, who has lost a reason for fighting, but in whom both the strength and the desire to fight have remained, who wants to possess the truth and knows he is desiring to grasp the moon, who wants to believe in the magical and the marvellous and under whose nose science has swept all magic.

FRIEND : But——

MASTER : I affirm that in man is placed the necessity for horrors in a greater measure than the necessity for deliverance from them. Oh, how I want, how I need ghosts and slippery nymphs and vampires with terrible red eyes. This has been found to be vanity and driven away, but at the same time life without it has become still vainer.

FRIEND: I don't understand; are you joking or——

MASTER: Woe to him whose æsthetic taste is too refined! Woe to him who, as I, looks into the future with bated breath, who desires with all his soul, but does not see there the superman.

FRIEND: I don't really understand what you're looking for! You want the restoration of the long obsolete forms of life.

MASTER: My dear friend, although perhaps even very highly respected people spread the report of my madness, it's not really true. I'm not striving for the alteration of social laws. You can't alter the inevitable. But if I could only fight for the beauty of olden life, if I could only count upon the very smallest success, how happy I should be, with what unweariedness, with what ardour I should set to work! But you remember your evangelist said that the social movement flows naturally from the historical development of society, and, most unfortunately, this is irrefutable. I could shout myself hoarse, crying, "Stop! Whither bound? Go back!" I could shout myself hoarse and not be heard.

FRIEND: It's amusing to listen to you.

MASTER : One must be a great philosopher to be reconciled with actual reality. But I cannot be reconciled ; I'm too proud, and to fight with it is out of the question. And I went away from that reality, I went away, to lose my despair in beautiful folly.

FRIEND : Permit me to remark upon this that to say that something is beautiful does not mean to say it is right, and I, in that case——

MASTER : Better beautiful and wrong, than right and ugly ; in both cases we're a thousand miles away from final truth.

FRIEND : Yes, but if you judge in that way——

MASTER : You understand, I was physically unable to bear any longer the society of those advanced fools. Lord, what a gang ! They poisoned the whole air. If I weren't sorry for the trees, I'd hang 'em all with my own hands ; I'd drown 'em all in the sea, if I didn't love the sea, I—I'd shove them all over a precipice, if only there were a precipice they wouldn't overfill ! Write for them ? Write for that mercantile riffraff ? !

FRIEND : But what are you occupied with here ?
What do you do, cut off from all the world ?

MASTER : We're busy with salting, boiling, pickling,

drying and soaking. We simply don't see time pass: hunting, looking after the estate; just look how many books we've got, let alone papers!

COMPANION: And did you see the tall tower on our house? We've got a telescope and we look at the skies for hours. And then riding and walking?

MASTER: If only you saw our wonderful marsh, behind the village cemetery. Not only we walk there in the dark midnights—little green fires, sweetly-sad as we, without direction and without purpose, move about us and wave——

COMPANION: We're almost the whole day in the fresh air.

MASTER: How strong I've got! What muscles, why—— (*To Companion.*) Bring a horseshoe or a poker and a pack of cards. (*Exit Companion.*) What do I do? There! read his diary.

FRIEND (*reads*): "Diary of daily events."

MASTER: Find to-day's date!

FRIEND: Yes, and then!

MASTER: Read more or less what I was occupied with to-day. (*Pours him out mead.*)

FRIEND (*reads*): "In the morning I went hunting with tolerable success, the reason of which was doubly sad thoughts about Anna——"

MASTER : That was his aunt.

FRIEND : " Still God is good. I wrote to my friend in town to send me another doctor. In the day I personally superintended the arrangement of the bath-house for the winter. Tarass was to dinner."

MASTER : A neighbour.

FRIEND : " We were much diverted with an anecdote made upon an oracle. My aunt felt herself so much improved at evening, that she was even desirous to be present at a comic performance of the house-servants, and they, rejoiced at her graciousness, did not spare their efforts to amuse and divert her at discretion."

MASTER : And this morning I, too, went hunting, in the daytime I superintended the dismantling of the bath-house, and this evening we, too, shall have a comic performance. (*Calls.*) Grusha ! Grusha !

FRIEND : H'm. (*Bitterly.*) It's all right for you to live like this—you've got so much money.

MASTER (*seriously*) : Yes, it is. I'm not complaining.

FRIEND : Pah ! Well, I'm damned ! Your frankness is very near cynicism. But are you really satisfied with such a life ? (*Drinks.*)

MASTER : Agree that it's more beautiful than yours.

FRIEND : But the reason for it——

MASTER : You madden me. What reason ? Can you still keep on hugging that “ reason ” ? What ! hasn't the senselessness of existence stared you in the face yet ? You haven't yet shrunk with horror at its look ? Wait, wait ! I had too high an opinion of you. The hour will come when it'll happen. The hour will come when the demon of vengeance will awake in you, the terrible demon of vengeance, and when you will want to seize the globe like a stone from the street of the world and throw it with all your force at the great Policeman. (*Enter Maid.*)

FRIEND : Lord, what a passion !

MASTER : A pipe. (*Exit Maid.*)

FRIEND : And you've become a phrase-maker, dear old chap. I hope you're not offended at my frankness, because——

MASTER : Come, can we be anything else ? It's time at last to recognise that even the cleverest of us, the most talented, the most learned, is no more than a posing phrase-maker. Aren't we all bewitched in a circle of error ; aren't all our reasonings the chatter of children ?

FRIEND : But you're not going to deny that the love of truth which lies in us——

MASTER : But the love of beauty and the love of pleasure lie in us too. My dear chap, you busy yourself with science and I with hunting, but which is the more important is not for us to decide. I have lost the measure of importance and, thank God ! I can do whatever comes into my mind without pangs of conscience. You understand, we've wasted what is most valuable of our heritage from our ancestors : credible knowledge and sound ethics. Ah ! these lovely sisters, these attentive slaves we've gambled away for that old rake, Scepticism !—But they have left us, with other old stuff, their garments, their grand motley garments, so-called “ phrases ” and “ poses.” Yes, my friend, it's sad, but it's so : there are only phrases and poses left to us. But still, it's good that there's something left : we can divert ourselves with these beautiful rags and remember those who were clad in them, whom they made so charming. To confound you with the charm of the expression, I say, “ Let not these rags lie unused in the wardrobe of our affliction ! ”

FRIEND : Bravo, bravo !

MASTER : There are left to us only phrases and poses ! Well ! Let's love them as dear toys are loved. (*Maid brings him a pipe.*) You smile, but—— (*Smokes.*) Jokes aside, without metaphors, what is there left credible to us beyond self-perception ? (*To Maid.*) Stop ! (*To Friend.*) “ Do I think it's dull ? ” “ Well,—— ” “ Should I like to see a lovely body dance among sharp swords ? ” “ I should.” There's an example of credibility ! Let my desires be absurd, I like them because they are credible for me. Begad, just something there's no doubt about ! (*To Maid.*) I want to see the “ Dance on the Wrathful Road.” Go away, undress and exhibit your art !

MAID (*looking at Friend*) : But—— (*Master turns to her.*) Very well, sir. (*Exit.*)

FRIEND : By Jove, I seem to be asleep again, but this time—I don't want to wake up. Your mead is incredibly strong. And it seemed to me that portrait smiled. Who is it ?

MASTER : My grandfather.

FRIEND : I thought it was you. (*Companion puts poker and cards on the table.*)

MASTER : I am such as he was—I'm made of the

same dough ; my soul is as masterly as his was. I'm not inferior to him, inferior in no way to him, but still—— Oh ! (*Points to Companion.*) Ask her how often I stand before this portrait and gnash my teeth with envy, and even weep. (*Picks up the poker and bends it.*) Tell me, how have I offended fate ? Why am I deprived of the powers and rights and all that importance which he had ? And if it had to be so, was it really necessary to leave me with a soul like his ? Why didn't they tear out of my heart all love of power, all masterly pride, all blue-blooded caprice ? (*Enter Servant.*)

COMPANION : What do you want ?

SERVANT : When do you order supper ?

MASTER : In an hour. Tell the Arab boy to be quick ! Take up the carpet ! Why is he so long with the swords ? And the fool ? Has he gone to sleep ? Wake him and tell him to bring the tambourines. Then light the chandeliers. And don't forget to burn perfumes !

SERVANT : Very well, sir. (*Exit.*)

FRIEND : All the same I'm sure that if you'd lived in that time, you'd have taken a most ardent part in the movement for emancipation.

MASTER: Quite possibly. Satiated with power, stung to the quick by the French, thirsting for popularity, taken with the difficulties of the problem—Begad, it's so seductive to be a pioneer. (*Picks up cards.*) Still, I think I should have been a reactionary. I don't know what would have been, and, what is, oh! better I didn't! (*Tears the pack of cards in half. Arab boy arranges swords for the dance.*)

COMPANION: Ah! here's the black boy.

MASTER (*smiles*): Young sulks!

FRIEND: What do you keep him for?

MASTER: Isn't he interesting?

COMPANION: In his eyes there is so much longing for the sultry sun and the sweet palms, that beside it our sorrows seem pale and unsubstantial.

FRIEND: Excellent!

MASTER (*to Companion*): Play us something.

COMPANION (*to Friend*): But you like music?

MASTER: He adores it. (*To Friend.*) Would you like to hear Mozart on the clavichord?

FRIEND: Perhaps the andante from the C sharp?

MASTER: I agree. (*Goes to the fire and throws away the halves of the torn cards.*)

FRIEND: Listen. For the last time I ask you to come back to us. I can't believe that you could seriously—Lord! how my head's turning from the mead and everything!

MASTER (*coolly*): He who is free from too firm convictions, who has passed through the school of the new Sakya-Muni and the new Zarathustra, who is far too clever to be ashamed to talk nonsense, who so resembles an Olympian that he is strong enough even to laugh at others' misfortunes—tell me on your conscience, what should such a man do among wretched, grey, blue-eyed neurasthenics, people who to-day or to-morrow will become Americans!

FRIEND: H'm.—Certainly, on those conditions—H'm—you know, it seems to me, the dramatic upshot of your working life would not be so terrible if you actually did go mad.

MASTER: You think so?

FRIEND: And know this, whether you'll be angry with me or not, all the same I'll tell everybody at Petersburg that you're mad!

MASTER: What for?

FRIEND: What for? Can I explain all this to them, are they capable of allowing for—— No,

it's impossible. Well, what shall I tell them ; what shall I tell them ?

MASTER : Tell them I'm fastidious—after that it's just routine ! Say that I don't want their life ! Be it full of all possible happiness, but—life is a little twig of lilac seized in the hand in the search for happiness, many-leaved happiness. Their life is ugly, withered, confused, soiled—in short, it's the life of the mob, though perhaps great happiness is hidden in it. My life is the twig of lilac which no one yet has touched, in which no one till me has yet sought his happiness——

FRIEND : You want them to think I'm laughing at them.

MASTER : And don't they deserve to be laughed at ?

COMPANION (*sitting at clavichord*) : May I begin ?

MASTER : Please ! (*Companion plays the andante cantabile from Mozart's sonata in C sharp. Friend listens enraptured. Master stands by the hearth, smiling sadly. After the first few bars of the third part of the andante.*)

FRIEND (*as if raving*) : Lord ! Oh, my God ! I'm asleep—I know it—I'm asleep and can't wake up ! Divine Mozart ! You died not long ago ! Oh, my head ! What's wrong with my heart ;

why are there tears in my eyes?—Divine Mozart ! What was far becomes near—very near. (*To Master.*) I know the worth of your words—they were all vain—vain—a game, a leap-frog of paradoxes, a dazzling firework of crackling phrases ! I know you're wrong, I know that well, but—my dear fellow—I—I feel for the moment as if you were right. D'you hear—I feel I understand it within my mind and—I'm ashamed, I'm absurdly ashamed to be in this grey, this shiny jacket.—Oh, my head !—It's burning, it's drugged with the floweriness of your words, the theatricalness of your poses—it's drunk with the look of this room. Your pathos is contagious ! I've become like you ! I've made myself a faithful mirror. What herbs, what resins are you burning ? Flight ! I want to flee from here ! The seduction is too great ; my soul has become too yielding. I don't want to be infected, I don't want to die, and a life like yours is the beginning of death. You've heard how men that are being hanged or drowning or freezing see magic dreams as they die. This sort of life is such a dream ; this sort of life is the beginning of death. You have separated from us, from all society, from

real life, and an early death is inevitable for you!—It's all the same, whether she comes as madness or in her usual guise—it's inevitable, I tell you. This strong mead has heated my head; who knows, perhaps it has made me a prophet.—An early death is inevitable for you! D'you hear, inevitable!

MASTER: Amen.

FRIEND: If you permit, I shall sleep here to-night; I'm too tired, but early to-morrow morning, at sunrise, give me horses, the quickest you have. (*A pause. Companion finishes the andante. Master kisses her.*)

MASTER (*passionately*): Hey! Begin! Androgyne, where are you? Quick! (*To Companion.*) Play! I like that "Dance of the Wrathful Road." It's the path of our life. Oh, don't joke! even we can be serious! It's the path of our life with its fatal dangers! One must be very clever not to suffer on this wrathful road. Play, girl! Grusha, dance! Begin! (*Companion begins Bach's bourrée in E sharp. Fool and Arab laugh merrily. Enter Maid and begins to dance.*)

(CURTAIN)

THE CHOICE OF A TUTOR

By DENIS VON VÍZIN

CHARACTERS

COUNT AND COUNTESS WEAKHEAD

WISELY

FLATTERNOT

THE YOUNG COUNT

NURSES

COUNTESS FOLLIEST

PELICAN

SERVANT

THE CHOICE OF A TUTOR

SCENE I

COUNTESS WEAKHEAD (*looking at the time*) : It has only just struck eight. Why have you risen so early, Count ?

COUNT : In the country it is a good thing to get up a little early.

COUNTESS : Yes, but not for a count. Your highness ought to live like a count ; we do not have to manage our affairs ; thank God, we own three thousand souls, and it will last our time ; and then I am not educated to look after things.

COUNT : True, Countess ; and I do not know any-one of your father's line who would be able to manage affairs. The line of Whirligigs is noble, I agree ; but not one Whirligig can manage affairs.

COUNTESS : Certainly ; I, although not a countess in my own right, am, however, of a good family

of nobles, and I think that my line does no discredit to the line of the Counts Weakhead.

COUNT: Countess, friend, I rose early to-day because I am concerned for the education of our Count Basil. Everyone tells me that he should now have a tutor: where will you find one here in the country?

COUNTESS: It seems to me, it would not be a bad thing to discuss it with our marshal. Although he is not very nice to ladies, yet for Count Basil's sake I am ready to speak to him; I only fear that he will give our son as instructor such a bear as himself. I mortally dislike serious faces

COUNT: I doubt whether Mr. Wisely be capable to choose an instructor for the son of Count Weakhead and his countess, born a Whirligig.

COUNTESS: However that may be, I have already sent for him. I think that our Mr. Wisely will not be too proud to visit Count Weakhead. There, he has come already.

WISELY (*enters*): You were pleased to send for me, and I supposed that you perhaps called me on urgent business, and did not delay to come to you.

COUNTRESS : I beg you to take a seat and converse with us about a very important matter.

WISELY (*sitting*) : What can I do ?

COUNT : We have a son of ten years ; we wish to give him a tutor. You are our marshal ; be so kind, advise us.

WISELY : The matter is important, certainly, as it concerns the education and consequently the well-being of a young noble ; but it is not such an affair that I need to have come to you.

COUNT : I feel that it was my duty to go to you myself, but my countess inconsiderately and without asking me sent for you ; excuse the impatience of a countess.

WISELY : I am not at all offended ; on the contrary, I am pleased that you would have come to me on this business. By my position I know all our nobles. Recently I made the acquaintance of a gentleman who not long ago bought a small village in our district—a Major Flatternot. If he were to consent to educate your son, would you be pleased ?

COUNT (*after a pause*) : Countess, speak !

COUNTRESS : A Russian tutor ! I do not like that very much.

COUNT : Does he know French ?

WISELY : Better than many of those Frenchmen whom you would be glad to receive in your house.

COUNT : What is his character ?

WISELY : His name is Flatternot, and he is quite worthy of that name.

COUNTESS (*sotto voce*) : A rude fellow, I am sure.

WISELY : Is it really to be rude not to flatter ?

COUNTESS : Almost.

WISELY : Allow me to assure you that from the person I recommend as instructor for your son you will have neither rudeness nor flattery.

COUNT : We, on our side, will neglect nothing to show him our respect, and will always call him "Your Honour."

WISELY : That is, you expect him every minute to call you "Your Highness."

COUNTESS : It seems to me that everyone should be given his proper title.

WISELY : But you consent to call him "Your Honour" for another reason.

COUNT : Which ?

WISELY : So that all should know that your son's tutor is a major.

COUNTESS : And is that a great thing ? My son is a count, and it seems to me that the major is not humbling himself to undertake his education.

WISELY : Mr. Flatternot certainly will not consider it a particular honour to be tutor to your son ; and if he does consent to undertake this position, it will be certainly only in order to be useful to a brother nobleman.

COUNTESS : I think, however, that rank is merit.

WISELY : The least of all human merits. To be born a count is not difficult, and one may by right of rank be called "Highness" without having high qualities, such as zealousness to be useful to one's country. You, your highness ! how have you served the country ?

COUNT : I was a subaltern in the Guards, with a captain's grade on retirement.

WISELY : Do not you yourself show the vanity of your rank as count ? I wager that your son, if he is taught by Mr. Flatternot, will have quite another sort of ideas, and will be worthy of the honour which the path of nature opens to him.

COUNT : I was unlucky in my service. I could not reach major, and am now obliged to nag about the country.

COUNTESS (*sotto voce*) : This man is irritating me !
If Mr. Flatternot reached major, I think he will teach my son to reach the same.

WISELY : Have no doubt of that ; he will teach your son to receive promotion in the service of his country, and not by bowing in great gentlemen's antechambers.

COUNTESS : Maid ! Call Count Basil here.

MAID : He is not pleased to come.

COUNT : Ask him from us. (*Enter the young Count and nurses.*)

NURSE : Come here, Count dear.

SECOND NURSE : Please come here, your highness !

THIRD NUSRE : Your hand, please, your highness !

YOUNG COUNT (*running up to her and giving his hand*) : There, kiss it.

COUNTESS : Count Basil, friend, embrace me.

YOUNG COUNT (*holding out his hand to her*) : There, mother. (*Holding out his hand to Wisely.*) There.

WISELY : I, friend, do not intend to kiss your paw ; give it to the Count, your father.

COUNT : And I don't want to.

YOUNG COUNT : Why ? You kissed it yesterday, father.

COUNT : Shame before a strange person.

COUNTESS : Shame to love one's son ?

WISELY : Shame to spoil one's son.

COUNTESS : You see, sir, that we are educating our son as seems proper.

WISELY : I see only that you are driving everlastingly " Your Highness " into his head.

COUNTESS : And it is proper to call him what he is.

WISELY : He is a child.

COUNTESS : And of what line ?

WISELY : A Weakhead.

COUNTESS : I hope that he has much of his father's blood in him.

WISELY : That is, the Weakheads'.

COUNTESS : And of his mother's ? (*The young Count turns away.*)

WISELY : There, that is your line, the Whirligigs.

COUNTESS : Count Basil is very lovable, is he not ?

WISELY : I do not know if he is lovable, but I see that he is much loved by you.

COUNT : I am curious to be acquainted with Mr. Flatternot. When could that be ?

WISELY : Now, if you wish.

COUNTESS : You would much oblige us.

WISELY (*going out*) : I will drive to him at once.

COUNT : I think the marshal will soon bring us Mr. Flatternot.

COUNTESS : I can imagine no good from it, and, to be sure, I should be furious with regret to hand over Count Basil to the hands of a Russian lout, like Flatternot.

COUNT : It will be in our will to take Flatternot or reject him.

COUNTESS : Count, friend, let us go to our apartments, that our expected guests should await us half an hour and see that they have come to your highness.

COUNT : For Heaven's sake, don't advise me that, if you do not wish to be a widow quickly.

COUNTESS : But why ?

COUNT : Mr. Flatternot, as I see it, is a man of merit, and certainly, being a major, does not wish to wait in a captain's anteroom ; he will get furious and cut me up.

COUNTESS : He dares not do this before the marshal.

COUNT : Well, you see, madame, that to-day rank alone is not much respected, and people who value it highly are thought fools ; and is Flatternot likely to contain himself for the marshal when

Mr. Wisely said to me himself, " There's no praying for fools ? "

COUNTESS : I cherish the hope that we shall get through without Flatternot. I received a letter to-day from Countess Folliest. She recommends me a French tutor, a Mr. Pelican, and we shall engage him.

COUNT : But first we'll have a look at Flatternot.

COUNTESS : Maybe ; I consent.

SERVANT (*entering*) : Your highness, the marshal has come with a strange gentleman.

COUNT : I'll go to meet him ; but you, Countess, receive them here.

SCENE II

COUNT : Countess, this is Mr. Flatternot. Mr. Flatternot, my wife.

FLATTERNOT (*kissing Countess's hand*) : I recommend myself to your highnesses' favour as a neighbour and nobleman of these parts.

COUNT : I beg you to be seated. Our respected marshal, no doubt, has already told you of our desire, just as we heard from him of your proposal to take charge of a young nobleman ?

FLATTERNOT : He has informed me of everything ; but beforehand I ought to hear from you yourselves what education you intend to give your son : what you wish to teach him, and to prepare him for which service ?

COUNT : I wished to hear of this from you.

FLATTERNOT : I should think to educate his mind as is fitting for a nobleman.

COUNTESS : Of the rank of count !

FLATTERNOT : I do not understand ; what difference do you find between the rank of nobleman and count ?

COUNTESS : I find, sir, this difference, that a count should be more careful than a nobleman that no one is lacking in respect of him.

COUNT : A count should be more delicate than a nobleman on the point of his honour. . . .

(A page is missing here in the original manuscript.)

COUNTESS : But I thought that nature and rank were the same thing.

WISELY : You hear, madame, that a natural count may be also a natural fool.

COUNTESS : And so Mr. Flatternot is not pleased that our son should know he is a count, and does not wish to give him the title of "Highness."

FLATTERNOT: I would not take upon myself the sin—do not be angry with me—to turn a little boy's head, like your son's, with fancies about his countship, highness, and similar folly; but I shall strive hard to set into his head and heart that he, being of noble birth, should possess, also, a noble mind.

COUNTESS: And that is not a bad thing. But what are you thinking about, Count?

COUNT: I am thinking of what I hear, and can think about nothing; I know it's dinner-time, and I beg you, marshal, and you, sir, to dine with me.

FLATTERNOT: At your service.

SERVANT: Dinner is served.

COUNT: Come.

SCENE III

COUNTESS (*alone*): Thank Heaven that dinner is over! I have come here to rest from the conversation of the marshal and Flatternot; Heaven protect us from such fault-finders! At dinner I received a letter from Countess Folliest; I did not manage to read it; now I'll read it at my leisure. (*Reads.*) "Dear Countess,—If you wish, you can take Mr. Pelican now as tutor for

COUNT BASIL. The Frenchman is full of abilities ; he draws teeth expertly and cuts corns." Oh, what luck ! He can cut corns too, and I so want some one ! " He will take a moderate salary, and will call you, Countess, as well as the Count : *votre altesse !* " (*Enter Count.*)

COUNTESS : Oh, my dear Count ! Countess Folliet is doing us a great favour ; she has found a tutor for Count Basil who can also draw teeth and cut corns ; and, what is most important, he will call us : *votre altesse !*

COUNT : What could be better ? (*Enter Wisely and Flatternot.*)

COUNT : What would you wish to teach my son ?

FLATTERNOT : First of all, the principles of the faith in which he was born.

COUNTESS : And dancing ?

FLATTERNOT : You are pleased to joke.

COUNT : And what foreign languages ?

FLATTERNOT : I begin with Latin.

COUNTESS : But is he to be a priest ?

FLATTERNOT : But is Latin only fit for priests ?

COUNT : I do not know why a count's son should learn Latin.

FLATTERNOT: Because it is the root of many languages.

COUNTESS: Well, I never.

COUNT (*to her*): Do not forget to send an answer quickly to Countess Folliest.

COUNTESS: At once. We will come back at once. Excuse us that we have to send off a postilion to our neighbour.

FLATTERNOT: At your service. (*Exeunt Count and Countess.*)

WISELY: Do you find the Count's household as I described it to you?

FLATTERNOT: Exactly. But it seems to me I am already beginning to be a burden to them.

WISELY: Yes, and they do not seem to be very contented with me. (*To Servant.*) Have my carriage got ready, friend. (*To Flatternot.*) We can go away at once.

COUNTESS (*entering, to Count*): I have invited the Countess herself with Pelican; maybe Count Basil will have a tutor after our heart.

COUNT (*aloud*): Here we are, gentlemen. We have hurried back to enjoy your conversation.

FLATTERNOT: A great honour.

COUNTESS : I wanted to ask you, Mr. Wisely, do you think it would be good to send our son to France in ten years' time ?

WISELY : You are looking far ahead, madame. We do not know whether in ten years' time there will be anyone to send or anyone to send him to.

FLATTERNOT : And I say in addition that we cannot foresee whether in ten years' time France itself will exist if the French gentlemen do not soon cease their runnings about.

WISELY : There is what a kingdom has come to, which all Europe for so many years has wished to imitate in everything. When I read descriptions of the ruinous condition of France, I should like to know against which political rule the French aim in establishing equality of condition.

COUNT : I do not understand it.

WISELY (*to Flatternot*) : I have not happened to speak with you of this ; I should like to know your opinion of it.

FLATTERNOT : I do not undertake at all to decide your question ; but I am ready to offer my opinion for your judgment. Here it is : nowhere and never have been or can be such laws as would

make every individual man happy. It is indispensably necessary that one part of the subjects should sacrifice something for the sake of the whole kingdom ; consequently there cannot be equality of position. That is the invention of the lying philosophers who by their eloquent intellectualisms have led the French to their present situation. They, desiring to avert the abuse of power, are endeavouring to destroy the form of government by which France has attained all her glory. For all this, however much the attempt may and will cost them, they will never attain an equality of situation, whatever laws they make ; for one part of the subjects will always require the sacrifice of another. That is what I think of the present French legislation.

WISELY : But if there cannot be laws to make every individual man happy, then what sort of legislation is left ?

FLATTERNOT : It remains to calculate that the number of sacrifices should be proportionate to the number of those for whose happiness sacrifices are made.

WISELY : So a legislator ought to be a great calculator.

FLATTERNOT: But these political calculations demand a far more excellent mind than is wanted for mathematical calculations. You can value a hundred Eulers for one Colbert and a thousand Colberts for one Montesquieu.

WISELY: But why?

FLATTERNOT: Because in mathematics from one certainty one goes on to another mechanically, so to speak, and the mathematician has before him all the discoveries of his predecessors; he needs to have only patience and ability to use them; but previous discoveries do not lead the politician on the right path. The mathematician reckons with figures, the politician with passions; in a word, the political sense is and ought to be incomparably higher and is much more rarely met with than the mathematical.

WISELY: Oh, how blessed is that land where such a rare political sense sits upon the throne!

FLATTERNOT: And how happy those who are citizens of such a land! (*To the Count.*) Of what are you thinking, Count?

COUNT: I do not understand anything of what you both were talking about.

WISELY : And have you heard that there are now no counts in France ?

COUNTESS : That is almost incredible ; I did hear something, but I could not believe it.

WISELY : Do you really not understand the French troubles ?

COUNT : I believe that they are great if they put counts on the same level as other people.

FLATTERNOT : When your son goes to France, he will not be a count.

COUNTESS : Then I shall not send him there—not for anything !

SERVANT (*enters*) : Countess Folliest has been pleased to come, with a stranger.

COUNTESS : I go to meet the benefactress of our house. (*Countess Folliest enters.*)

Both COUNTESSSES : Your highness !

COUNTESS FOLLIEST : I present Mr. Pelican to you.

PELICAN (*grimacing*) : Votre altesse !

COUNTESS FOLLIEST : Here is a tutor for your son, dear Countess.

PELICAN (*grimacing*) : Votre altesse !

WISELY : I know that ugly face.

PELICAN (*sees Wisely and runs away, shrieking*) : I don't want be here, I don't !

COUNTESS FOLLIEST : What has happened to him ?

WISELY : I will solve the riddle for you. That empty-headed Frenchman was a nurse's assistant in an almshouse in France ; he can draw teeth and cut corns—nothing else. He came to Russia, and I found him in another neighbourhood, where I have an estate, among the teachers of young noblemen. I considered it my duty to inform the Governor of this, and he, thinking such vagabonds harmful to the country, cleared him out on my representation, and therefore, when he saw me here, he ran away, fearing evidently that I shall clear him out by the neck again. However that may be, I shall see the Governor to-morrow and endeavour to remove him from our district in twenty-four hours.

COUNTESS : Marshal, moderate your strictness at our request.

WISELY : Countess, you are free to follow or not follow my advice as to the education of your son by the person I have introduced to you ; but I, as marshal of the nobility, cannot endure that such a rascal should be in our midst to corrupt the hearts and heads of young noblemen.

COUNTESS (*to herself*) : If I had thought, by sending

for the marshal to find an instructor for our son, we would lose through him a competent tutor who would come into the room and give us our due at once by calling me and my husband, *votre altesse* !

COUNTESS FOLLIEST : Why is the marshal at your house ?

FLATTERNOT : I came here on the invitation of the marshal, who is zealous for the advantage of noblemen ; but now I shall not consent for anything in the world to be the instructor of a boy whose parents are infected entirely by fancies about rank.

WISELY (*to Count and Countess*) : Your humble servant ! In advance, do not expect me again.

COUNT : As you wish.

COUNTESS : Countess, let us go to our apartments.
(*Exeunt Count and Countesses.*)

FLATTERNOT : Queer people ! Tell me, what guides their thoughts and deeds ?

WISELY : What guides them ? Silly pride.

(CURTAIN)

THE WEDDING
By ANTON CHÉHOV

✧

CHARACTERS

APLOMBOV	DASHENKA
JIGALOV	MRS. JIGALOV
MISS ZMEWKIN	YAT
DIMBA	MOZGOVY
CAPTAIN REVUNOV	KARAYÚLOV
M.C.	NEWNIN
GUESTS	WAITERS

THE WEDDING

(A brightly lit room, with a big table laid for supper. Around the table bustle waiters in frock-coats. The last figure of a quadrille can be heard. Enter Miss Zmewkin—accoucheuse, thirty years old, in a bright scarlet dress—Mr. Yat, and the Master of Ceremonies. They pass across the stage.)

ZMEWKIN : No ! No ! No !

YAT (*following*) : Be merciful ! Be merciful !

ZMEWKIN : No ! No ! No !

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*hurrying after them*) :

Please, you mustn't, you mustn't ! Where are you going ? But the grand-chain, silvooplay. (*Exeunt. Enter Mrs. Nastasia Jigalov, mother of the bride, and Aplombov, the bridegroom.*)

NASTASIA : Instead of worrying me with all your talk, you'd do better to go and dance !

APLOMBOV : I'm not Spinoso anyhow, to make cracknels of my legs. I'm a man of position and

character, and I don't find any distraction in empty pleasures. But this has nothing to do with dancing. Excuse me, Mama, but I don't understand a lot of your behaviour. For instance, besides all the things for the house, you promised to give me your two lottery-tickets with your daughter. Where are they?

NASTASIA: How my head aches!—If this weather keeps on, there ought to be a thaw.

APLOMBOV: You won't wear *my* teeth out with talking! I found out to-day that your tickets were pledged at the bank. Excuse me, Mama, but only exploiters behave like that. Now, I'm not speaking from selfishness—I don't want your tickets!—but from principle; I don't let anybody deceive me. I've made your daughter happy, and, if you don't hand me over those tickets to-day, I'll eat your daughter with pudding! I'm a man of noble feelings.

NASTASIA (*looking at the table and counting the places*): One, two, three, four, five——

SERVANT: The cook wants to know how you order the ices to be served, with rum, with madeira, or without anything.

APLOMBOV: With rum. And tell the proprietor

there's only a little wine. Tell him to send up some Haut-Sauterne. (*To Nastasia.*) And you promised and we agreed that a general would be at the supper to-night. Where is he, I should like to know.

NASTASIA : It's not my fault, my dear !

APLOMBOV : Whose, then ?

NASTASIA : Andrew's fault. Yesterday he was here and promised to bring a real general. (*Sighs.*) He can't have found one or he'd have brought him. You don't think we begrudge the expense ? We grudge our children nothing. But, after all, what's a general !

APLOMBOV : Well again, surely you knew, Mama, that this telegraph fellow, Yat, was running after Dashenka until I proposed to her ? Why did you invite him ? Didn't you really know that he's an enemy of mine ?

NASTASIA : Oh, Epaminondas, what's the matter with you ? The wedding-day isn't over yet and already you're tiring me and Dashenka to death with your talking. What will it be like as time goes on ? You're wearisome, wearisome.

APLOMBOV : It isn't nice to hear the truth ? Ha, ha. There you are. But act nobly ! Only one

thing I ask of you—be noble ! (*Through the room, from one door to the other couples pass, dancing the grand-chain. The first couple is Dashenka and the Master of Ceremonies, behind them Yat and Zmewkin. They stop dancing and stay in the room. Enter Jigalov and Dimba, and go to the table.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES : Promenade ! Messieu's, promenade ! (*Off.*) Promenade ! (*Exeunt the couples.*)

YAT : Be merciful ! Be merciful, enchanting Miss Zmewkin !

ZMEWKIN : Oh ! what a man you are ! I've told you already I'm not in voice.

YAT : I entreat you, sing ! Only one note ! Be merciful ! Only one note !

ZMEWKIN : I'm tired. (*Sits down and fans herself.*)

YAT : No, you're simply pitiless ! Such an inhuman creature, permit me to use the expression, and such a wonderful, wonderful voice. With a voice like that, excuse the expression, you ought not to be an accoucheuse, but singing at public concerts. For instance, how divinely the trills emerge from you in that one (*sings*) : " I loved you, my love is yet in vain."—Wonderful !

ZMEWKIN (*sings*): "I loved you, perhaps I still may love."—That one?

YAT: That's the one! Wonderful!

ZMEWKIN: No, I'm not in voice to-day. Take my fan, fan me; it's so hot. (*To Aplombov.*) Why are you so melancholy? Can a bridegroom really be like that? Aren't you ashamed, you contrary man? What are you thinking about?

APLOMBOV: Marriage is a serious step. You have to consider everything from all points of view——

ZMEWKIN: How contrary you all are! What sceptics! Beside you I feel stifled! Give me atmosphere! Do you hear? Give me atmosphere! (*Sings.*)

YAT: Wonderful. Wonderful!

ZMEWKIN: Fan me, fan me! I feel my heart is just going to break. Tell me, please; why do I feel so hot?

YAT: Because you perspire.

ZMEWKIN: Pfui! What a vulgar creature you are! Don't dare speak to me like that!

YAT: I beg your pardon. You have been used, I know, to, excuse the expression, aristocratic company, and——

ZMEWKIN : Oh ! let me be ! Give me poetry, ecstasy ! Fan me ! Fan me !

JIGALOV (*to Dimba*) : We'll have another, eh ? I can drink any time. The chief thing, Dimba, is not to forget one's affairs. Drink, and understand your affairs ! And as for drinking, why not drink ? Drinking's allowed ; your health ! (*Drinks.*) Tell me, have you got tigers in Greece ?

DIMBA : Yes.

JIGALOV : And lions ?

DIMBA : Yes, lions too. In Russia there is nothing, but in Greece everything. My father's there and my uncle and my brothers, and here nothing.

JIGALOV : But have you got whales in Greece ?

DIMBA : We've everything there.

NASTASIA (*to her husband*) : Why all this random drinking and eating ? It's time we all sat down. Don't stick a fork in the lobster ! It's for the general. Perhaps he'll come after all.

JIGALOV : Have you got lobsters in Greece ?

DIMBA : Yes, we've everything there.

ZMEWKIN : I'm just thinking—what atmosphere in Greece !

JIGALOV : And probably a lot of trickery. Greeks

are all just the same as Armenians and gypsies. They'll give you a sponge or a goldfish, but all the time they're watching their chance to relieve you of your superfluities. We'll have another, eh?

NASTASIA: What are all these anothers? It's time we all sat down. It's twelve o'clock.

JIGALOV: Sit down, then, sit down! (*Calls.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I humbly entreat you. Please. Supper! Young people!

NASTASIA: Welcome, dear guests. Be seated.

ZMEWKIN (*sits at the table*): Give me poetry! "But ah! the rebel, sought the storm, as in the storm were peace." Give me storm!

YAT (*aside*): Remarkable woman! I'm in love—up to the ears in love! (*Enter the company. They take their seats noisily at the table; a minute's pause, the band plays a march.*)

MOZGOVY (*in the uniform of a naval volunteer, rising*): Ladies and gentlemen! I must tell you this; there are many toasts and speeches waiting for us. We won't wait. We'll begin at once. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to drink a toast to the bride and bridegroom. (*The band plays a flourish. "Hurrah!" Clinking of glasses.*)

MOZGOVY : It's bitter !

ALL : Bitter ! Bitter ! (*Aplombov and Dashenka kiss.*)

YAT : Wonderful, wonderful ! I must express to you, ladies and gentlemen, with the utmost veracity, that this room and the place in general are magnificent. Superlatively enchanting.—But do you know why it does not partake of a complete triumph ? There's no electric light, excuse the expression. Electric light has been introduced already in all countries ; only Russia is left behind.

JIGALOV (*thoughtfully*) : Electric—h'm. But to my idea, electric light is just trickery. They put a little bit of coal there and think they can deceive your eyes with it. No, friend, if you give light, then don't give coal, but something real, something special, something you can take hold of. Give a light, you understand, a light which is something and not simply an idea.

YAT : If only you were to see what an electric battery is composed of, you'd think differently.

JIGALOV : I don't want to see it. Trickery ! They deceive simple folk, and squeeze them to the last drop. We know that sort of people. And you,

young man, instead of defending trickery, would have done better to drink and pour out for others. That's the truth !

APLOMBOV : I quite agree with you, dear papa. Why introduce scientific discourses ? I myself am ready to speak about certain discoveries, but then there's another time for that. (*To Dashenka.*) What's your opinion, ma chère ?

DASHENKA : They like to show their education and always speak about something one can't understand.

NASTASIA : Heavens ! We have lived our time without education, and now we're marrying our third daughter to a fine husband. If you think we are uneducated, why do you come to us ? Be off with your education !

YAT : Madame, I always take your family into consideration, and if I spoke about electric light it does not signify that I did so from pride. Your healths ! I always with all my heart wished Dashenka a good husband. It is hard nowadays, Madame, to find a good man. Nowadays everyone watches his chance to marry for interest, for money——

APLOMBOV : That is an insinuation !

YAT (*fearfully*) : No, there's no allusion to anybody ! I'm not speaking of present company. I was speaking just in general—please ! I know well that you married for love and the dowry's nothing.

NASTASIA : No, it isn't nothing ! Don't forget yourself, sir, when you speak ! Beside a thousand roubles in actual coin, we are giving three sets of furs, bedding and all the furniture. Just see if other people give dowries like that.

YAT : I don't mean anything—the furniture is really beautiful and—and the furs certainly—but I mean they took offence that I made insinuations.

NASTASIA : Don't make insinuations ! We respect you for your parents and we invited you to the wedding, but you say all sorts of things. And if you knew that Epaminondas was marrying for interest, why did you say nothing beforehand ? (*Weeps.*) Perhaps—I have nourished her and cared for her and looked after her—I should have guarded better my emerald, my jewel, my daughter——

APLOMBOV : You believe him ? I most humbly thank you ! I'm very grateful indeed to you.

(*To Yat.*) As for you, Mr. Yat, although you are an acquaintance of mine, I don't allow you to behave so badly in a strange house. Have the goodness to go away!

YAT: What's the matter?

APLOMBOV: I wish you were as honourable as I am! In short, have the goodness to go away!

GENTLEMEN (*to Aplombov*): Now, stop! Remember where you are! Never mind! Sit down! Stop!

YAT: I didn't mean anything—You know, I—I don't understand. Excuse me, I'm going. Only give me first the five roubles you owe me from last year for the waistcoat, excuse the expression. Your health again and—and I'm going; only first pay me what you owe.

GENTLEMEN: Now, let it be, let it be. Enough! Is all this nonsense worth while?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*loudly*): To the health of the parents of the bride, Mr. and Mrs. Jigalov! (*Band plays a flourish. "Hurrah."*)

JIGALOV (*bows with emotion on all sides*): Thank you, dear guests. I am very grateful to you not to have forgotten us and to have been good enough not to ignore us. And don't think I've got crafty in my old age, or that there's any trickery; I say

simply my feelings, from the bottom of my heart. I grudge nothing to good people. We humbly thank you. (*Kisses all round.*)

DASHENKA (*to her mother*) : Mama dear, why are you crying ? I am so happy.

APLOMBOV : Mama is upset at the separation. But I would advise her instead to remember our recent conversation !

YAT : Don't cry, Madame ! You think that such tears are natural ? Not at all, simply a low-spirited nervous system——

JIGALOV : And are there chestnuts in Greece ?

DIMBA : Yes, there's everything there.

JIGALOV : But not mushrooms.

DIMBA : Yes, mushrooms too. Everything !

MOZGOVY : Mr. Dimba, it's your turn to make a speech. Ladies and gentlemen, allow Mr. Dimba to make a speech.

ALL (*to Dimba*) : Speech ! Speech ! Your turn !

DIMBA : What for ? I don't understand what—what's the matter ?

JIGALOV : No, no ! Don't dare refuse ! It's your turn ! Up you get !

DIMBA (*rises in confusion*) : I can say—Russia is one thing and Greece is another. Now the people

in Greece are one thing, and the people in Russia are another. And the "karavia" which sail on the sea you call ships, and those that go on land you call railways—I understand well. We are Greeks, you are Russians, and I want nothing—I can say—Russia is one thing and Greece is another. (*Enter Newnin.*)

NEWNIN : Stop, ladies and gentlemen, don't go on eating ! Wait a little ! Madame, just half a minute ! Please come here ! (*Takes Nastasia aside, breathlessly.*) Listen, the general's just coming. At last I've found one. I was simply in agony. A real general, in the flesh, old, eighty, perhaps, or ninety, years old——

NASTASIA : When is he coming ?

NEWNIN : This very moment. You'll be grateful to me all your life. He's not a general, he's a peach ! A marvel ! Not any foot regiment, not infantry at all, but navy ! In rank he's a second-grade captain, and with them, in the navy, that's just the same as a field-marshal or, in civil rank, a privy councillor. Absolutely the same ! Even higher !

NASTASIA : You're not deceiving me, Andrew ?

NEWNIN : Now, am I a rascal ? Don't you worry.

NASTASIA (*sighing*): I don't want to waste money, Andrew.

NEWNIN: Don't you worry. He's not a general, he's a work of art! (*Raises his voice.*) And I said to him, "You've quite forgotten us, your excellency," I said. "It's not right, your excellency, to forget old friends! Mrs. Jigalov is very angry with you," I said. (*Goes to table and sits down.*) And he said, "My dear friend, how can I go if I am not a friend of the bridegroom's?" "Oh, that's being too much, your excellency," I said. "What ceremonies! The bridegroom," I said, "is a most charming, open-hearted man. To be working with an appraiser at the bank, you don't think, your excellency, this is a young good-for-nothing. Why," I said, "nowadays even noble ladies work at banks." He clapped me on the shoulder, I smoked a Havana with him, and now he's coming. Wait just a moment, ladies and gentlemen, don't go on eating!

APLOMBOV: And when is he coming?

NEWNIN: This moment. When I left him, he was already putting on his goloshes. Wait just a moment, ladies and gentlemen, don't go on eating!

APLOMBOV : We must tell them to play a march.

NEWNIN (*loudly*) : Hey, musicians ! A march !

(*Band plays a march.*)

SERVANT (*announcing*) : Mr. Revunov-Karayúlov !

(*Jigalov, Nastasia, and Newnin run to meet him.*

Enter Revunov-Karayúlov.)

NASTASIA : Welcome, welcome, your excellency.

Very kind——

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Extremely !

JIGALOV : Your excellency, we are not eminent, not exalted people, but simple folk ; but do not think there is any trickery on our side. There is always the first place in our house for good people ; we grudge them nothing. Welcome !

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Extremely pleased !

NEWNIN : Allow me to introduce the bridegroom, Mr. Aplombov, your excellency, and his newly-born—I mean, newly-wed—wife ! And this is Mr. Yat, of the telegraph. This is Mr. Dimba, a foreign gentleman of Greek nationality, in the confectionery profession. And so on, and so on—the rest are all—rubbish. Take a seat, your excellency.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Extremely ! Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I just want to say two

words to Andrew. (*Takes Newnin aside.*) I'm a little confused, my friend. Why did you call me "your excellency"? I'm not a general, I'm a second-grade captain, and that's lower than a colonel.

NEWNIN (*shouts in his ear*): Oh, yes, yes, I know, but allow us to call you "your excellency"! The family here, you know, is patriarchal, it respects the aged, it loves respect for rank.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: Well, if that's the case, then by all means! (*They go to the table.*) Extremely!

NASTASIA: Take a seat, your excellency. Be so kind! Take something to eat, your excellency. Only excuse us, at home you must be used to everything elegant, but with us it's all simple.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*hearing badly*): What? H'm—Oh, yes. (*Pause.*) Oh, yes. In the old times people always lived simply and were satisfied. I am a man with a certain rank and yet I live simply. To-day Andrew came to me and invited me to the wedding. "How can I go," I said, "if I don't know them? It's not the proper thing." But he said, "These are simple people,

patriarchal, pleased to welcome guests." "Well," I said, "by all means, if that's the case! Why not? Very glad. It's dull for me at home alone, and if my presence at the wedding can cause any pleasure, so do me the favour," said I.

JIGALOV: You really mean it, your excellency? I esteem you for it. I'm a simple man myself, without any trickery, and I esteem such people. Take something to eat, your excellency.

APLOMBOV: You have been long retired, your excellency?

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: Eh? Oh, yes, yes, that's so. True. Yes. But excuse me, what's all this? Bitter herrings and bitter bread! One can't eat anything!

ALL: Bitter! Bitter! (*Aplombov and Dashenka kiss.*)

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: Hee, hee, hee. Your healths (*Pause.*) Yes! In the old days all was simple and everyone was satisfied. I love simplicity. I'm an old man; I retired in '65; I'm seventy-two years old. (*Sees Mozgovy.*) You're a sailor, then?

MOZGOVY: Yes, I am.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: Aha! So! Yes! Service

at sea was always hard. There are things to ponder and split your head about. Every insignificant word has, so to speak, its separate meaning. For instance—the fore-topman in the shrouds on the top-gallant lashings! What does that mean? A sailor understands! Hee, hee. Now where's your mathematics!

NEWNIN: The health of his excellency, Captain Revunov-Karayúlov! (*Band plays a flourish. "Hurrah."*)

YAT: Your excellency, you were pleased just now to express yourself on the subject of the hardness of naval service. But tell me if the telegraph's any easier? Nowadays, your excellency, no one can enter the telegraph service unless he can read and write French and German. But the hardest thing we have to do is the transmission of telegrams. Terribly hard. Please listen a moment. (*Raps with a fork on the table, imitating a telegraphic apparatus.*)

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: What's that?

YAT: That's for: I esteem you, your excellency, for your virtues. You think it's easy? And again. (*Raps.*)

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV: Louder. I can't hear you.

YAT : And that's for : Madame, how happy I'am to clasp you in my embraces !

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : What lady ? Yes. (*To Mozgovy.*) And then, suppose it's blowing half a gale and you've got—you've got to hoist the foretop halliards and the tops'l gallants. You must give the order : " Mount the rigging to the foretop halliards and the tops'l gallants," and at the same time as they loose the sails on the stays, below they are standing to the main lashings and the tops'l gallant halliards——

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*rising*) : Dear ladies and gentle——

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*breaking in*) : Yes ! A few other commands ? Yes ! To furl the foretop halliards and the tops'l gallants ! Good ? Now what does that mean, what's the meaning of it ? It's very simple. To furl, you know, the foretop halliards and the tops'l gallants and hoist the mains'l—all at once ! They must level the foretopmains and the tops'l gallant halliards on the hoist ; at the same time, there's the necessity of strengthening the braces of all the sails ; and when the stays are taut and the braces raised all round, then the foretop halliards and the

tops'l gallants, settling conformably with the direction of the wind——

NEWNIN : Your excellency, the host begs you to speak of something else. The guests don't understand all this, and it's dull.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : What ? Who's dull ? (*To Mozgovy.*) Young man, suppose the vessel is lying by the wind, on the starboard course, under full stretch of canvas, and you have to bring her over before the wind ? What orders must you give ? Why, this : Whistle all hands on deck for a tack across before the wind. Hee, hee !

NEWNIN : Yes, yes ! Take something to eat.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Just as they all come running out, at once you give the command : "Stand to stations for a tack across before the wind !" Ah ! That's life ! You give the order and watch how the sailors, like lightning, run to their places and adjust the lashings and the halliards. You finish by shouting out, "Bravo, my fine fellows." (*Shouts and chokes.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*hastens to take advantage of the probable pause*) : On this day, to-day, so to speak, on which we are collected together here to do honour to our beloved——

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*breaking in*): Yes! Yes!

And all this has to be remembered. For instance, halliard-royals, tops'l gallants——

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*offended*): What's he interrupting for? We can't say a single word.

NASTASIA: We ignorant people, your excellency, do not understand anything of this. But tell us instead something to please——

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*misunderstanding*): I've just eaten some, thank you. You said "cheese," did you not? Thank you. Yes! I was recalling old times. But certainly it's fine, young man. "If you sail on the sea, you'll know no care." (*With a trembling voice.*) You recollect the delight of tacking in a gale? What seaman does not light up at the recollection of this manoeuvre? The very moment the command resounds, "Pipe all hands aloft," an electric spark seems to fly over everybody. From the commander to the lowest sailor—all tremble with excitement——

ZMEWKIN: O, how dull! How dull! (*General murmur.*)

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*misunderstanding*): Thank you, I have had some. (*With rapture.*) Everyone gets ready and turns his eyes on the first officer.

"Stand to the gallants and starboard tops'l braces, and the port main braces, and port counter-braces," orders the first officer. All is accomplished in a moment ; halliard royals and tops'l lashings heaved. All right on board ! (*Stands up.*) Off flies the vessel in the wind and at last the sails begin to get wet. The first officer cries, "The braces, don't dawdle at the braces," and fixes his eyes on the maintop, and when at last the tops'l gets wet, at that moment the vessel begins to tack, and you hear the loud command, "Loose the maintop halliards, let go the braces," then everything flies off with a crack—like the Tower of Babel—and all is accomplished without a fault. You've tacked !

NASTASIA (*bursting out*) : But, General, you're being unpleasant ! You ought to know better, at your age ! You're unpleasant !

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Pheasant ? No, I haven't had any. Thank you.

NASTASIA (*loudly*) : I said, you're being unpleasant !

You ought to know better, at your age, General.

NEWNIN (*agitated*) : Now, come—there, there. Really——

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : For the first thing, I'm not

a general, but a second-grade captain, which corresponds on the list to a lieutenant-colonel——

NASTASIA : Then, if you're not a general, why did you take the money ? And we didn't pay you money for you to be unpleasant.

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV (*perplexed*) : What money ?

NASTASIA : You know what money ! You received through Mr. Newnin twen—— (*To Newnin.*) But it's your fault, Andrew. I didn't ask you to hire such a man.

NEWNIN : Now, there—let it be ! Is it worth while ?

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : Hired—paid—what's this ?

APLOMBOV : But excuse me. You received the twenty-five roubles from Mr. Newnin ?

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : What twenty-five roubles ? (*Ponders.*) Ah ! I see ! Now I understand everything. How disgusting ! How disgusting !

APLOMBOV : Then you did receive the money ?

REVUNOV-KARAYÚLOV : I received no money at all ! Off with you ! (*Leaves the table.*) How disgusting ! How low ! To affront an old man, a sailor, an officer of merit ! If this were decent society, I'd challenge you to a duel, but now what can I do ? (*Muddled.*) Where's the door ?

Which is the way out? Waiter! Show me out!

Waiter! How low! How disgusting! (*Exit.*)

NASTASIA: Andrew, where are those twenty-five roubles?

NEWNIN: Come, is it worth while to speak of such trifles? Everybody else is gay, but you, Heaven knows why—(*Shouts.*) To the health of the young people! Musicians, play a march! Musicians! (*Band begins to play a march.*) To the health of the young people!

ZMEWKIN: I feel stifled! Give me atmosphere! Beside you I feel stifled!

YAT (*in an ecstasy*): Wonderful woman! Wonderful woman! (*The noise gets louder.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (*stands and shouts*): Dear ladies and gentlemen! On this day, to-day, so to speak——

(CURTAIN)

THE JUBILEE
By ANTON CHÉHOV

■ CHARACTERS

SHIPUCHIN

TATIANA

HIRIN

MRS. MERCHUTKIN

MANAGERS

THE JUBILEE

(Scene : The managing director's study at a bank, furnished with affected sumptuousness. Velvet-covered furniture, flowers, statues, rugs, telephone. Midday. Hirin, the bookkeeper, is alone.)

HIRIN (*shouts at the door*) : Go to the chemist's and get three ha'penny worth of nerve tonic, and tell them to bring some fresh water to the director's study. I've got to tell you a hundred times ! (*Goes to table.*) I'm tired out. I've been writing for four days without closing my eyes ; from morning to evening I'm writing here, and from evening to morning, at home. (*Coughs.*) My whole body's inflamed. Shivering, fever, coughing ; I've got rheumatism in my legs, things keep coming in front of my eyes. (*Sits down.*) Our old joker, this brute, this managing director, is going to read the report to-day at the general meeting : " Our bank at the present moment and in time to

come"—you'd think he was Gambetta. (*Writes.*) Two, one, one, six, nought, seven, add six, nought, one, six—He wants to throw dust in their eyes ; so I've got to sit here and work for him like a nigger. He just puts the poetry into the report ; but I must tap away on the counting machine all day long, hell take him. (*Taps the machine.*) I can't stand it. (*Writes.*) One to carry, three, seven, two, one, nought. He promised to pay me for my trouble. If everything goes off well to-day and he takes in the public, he's promised me a gold pendant and three hundred roubles. We'll see. (*Writes.*) Well, and if all my trouble goes for nothing, well, my friend, I'm sorry—I'm a passionate man ! Yes, my friend, in a fit of temper I can even commit a crime. Yes ! (*Off, noise and applause. Shipuchin's voice, "Thank you ! Thank you ! I am moved !"*) *Enter Shipuchin, middle-aged, in a frock-coat and white tie, with a monocle. He carries an album which has just been presented to him. All the while he is on the stage, employees bring him papers to sign.)*

SHIPUCHIN (*standing at the door*) : This gift of yours, dear colleagues, I shall preserve to my death, as a

remembrance of the happiest days of my life !
Yes, my dear, dear sirs ! Once again I thank you.
(*Throws them a kiss, and goes up to Hirin.*) My
dear fellow, my esteemed Hirin !

HIRIN (*rising*) : I have the honour to congratulate
you, Mr. Shipuchin, on your fifteenth year at the
head of the bank and I hope that——

SHIPUCHIN (*squeezing his hand*) : Thank you, my
dear fellow. Thank you ! This notable day,
this jubilee—Very, very glad ! Thank you for
your services, for everything ; for everything I
thank you. If, while I have had the honour to
be managing director of this bank, if anything
useful has been done, then I am indebted for it
before all else to my colleagues. (*Sighs.*) Yes,
my dear fellow, fifteen years ! Fifteen years, or
I'm not Shipuchin ! (*Briskly.*) Well, what about
my report ? Is it coming along ?

HIRIN : Yes. There are about five pages left.

SHIPUCHIN : Excellent. That means, it will be
ready at three ?

HIRIN : If nobody disturbs me, it'll be finished.
There's just rubbish left.

SHIPUCHIN : Magnificent. Magnificent, or I'm not
Shipuchin ! The general meeting will be at four.

Please, dear old chap ; give me the first half, and I'll study it. Give it me quick. (*Takes the report.*) I base gigantic hopes on this report. It's my "profession de foi," or, to put it better, my firework—my firework, or I'm not Shipuchin ! (*Sits down and reads the report to himself.*) But I'm devilish tired. Last night I had an attack of gout, all the morning I've been busy with little affairs and running about, then these commotions and ovations and agitations—I'm tired.

HIRIN : Two, nought, nought, three, nine, two, nought—It's all green before my eyes with figures.

Three, one, six, four, one, five. (*Taps the machine.*)

SHIPUCHIN : And another bother—This morning your wife called on me and complained about you again. She said, last night you ran after her and your sister-in-law with a knife. What does that look like, Hirin ? Come, come !

HIRIN (*roughly*) : I take the liberty, Mr. Shipuchin, on the occasion of the jubilee, to make a request to you. I beg you, if only out of consideration for my working like a nigger, not to interfere with my family life. Please don't !

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs*) : You've got an impossible character, Hirin. You're an excellent fellow and

respectable, but when it comes to women you behave like Jack the Ripper. Really, I can't understand why you dislike them so !

HIRIN : And I can't understand why you like them so. (*Pause.*)

SHIPUCHIN : The employees have just presented me with an album and the managers, so I hear, want to present me with an address and a silver bowl. (*Plays with his monocle.*) Good, or I'm not Shipuchin ! That's not without its use. For the reputation of the bank, some pomp is necessary, damn it all. You're a good fellow ; after all, you know all about it. I wrote the address myself and bought the silver bowl as well. The binding for the address cost a lot, but it wouldn't do without it. By themselves they wouldn't have been good for anything. (*Looks round.*) What an establishment ! What an establishment ! They may say I am trivial, because I want the brass on the doors polished and the people on my staff to wear fashionable ties and a fat porter to stand at the door. Not at all, gentlemen. The brass on the doors and the fat porter are not trifles. At my own home I can be an ordinary person, eat and sleep like a pig, and drink and drink——

HIRIN : No allusions, if you please !

SHIPUCHIN : Oh, nobody's making allusions. What an impossible character you've got ! This is what I'm saying—at home I can be an ordinary person, a parvenu, a slave to habits, but here everything must be " en grand ! " This is the bank ! Here every detail must, so to speak, be imposing and have a dignified appearance. (*Picks up a piece of paper and throws it in the grate.*) It is my particular pride that I have raised high the reputation of the bank. It's a big thing, tone, a big thing, or I'm not Shipuchin ! (*Looks at Hirin.*) My dear fellow, at any moment the deputation of the managers may arrive, and you're in felt slippers, in that scarf, in that wild-coloured jacket ; you might have put on a frock-coat, well, anyhow, a black coat——

HIRIN : My health is more to me than your bank-managers. My whole body's inflamed.

SHIPUCHIN (*disturbed*) : But agree with me that it's untidy ! You spoil the ensemble.

HIRIN : When the deputation comes, I can hide—that's not a great misfortune. (*Writes.*) Seven, one, seven, two, one, five, nought. I too don't like untidiness. Seven, two, nine. (*Taps the*

machine.) I can't bear untidiness ! You'd have done well to-day not to invite ladies to the jubilee dinner.

SHIPUCHIN : What nonsense !

HIRIN : I know you are letting them in to-day so as to be elegant. But, you see, they'll spoil everything for you. From them comes all untidiness.

SHIPUCHIN : On the contrary, women's society elevates.

HIRIN : Yes ! Now, you'd call your wife an educated woman ; and last Monday she said a thing that made me gasp for a couple of days. Suddenly she asked me before strangers, " Is it true that at our bank my husband bought those shares in the Drage-Prage bank which dropped on the Exchange ? Oh, my husband is so uneasy ! " And that before strangers ! And why you're so open with them, I can't understand. Do you want them to lead you into the courts ?

SHIPUCHIN : All right, enough, enough. This is all too gloomy for a jubilee. But you do well to remind me. (*Looks at his watch.*) My wife should be here immediately. In the ordinary way I should have driven to the station to meet the poor

girl, but there's not time and—and I'm tired. To tell the truth, I'm not glad she's coming. I'm glad, but it would have been better for me if she had stayed just another two days with her mother. She wants me to spend the whole evening with her to-day, and all the time there's a little excursion arranged for after dinner. (*Shudders.*) That nervous shivering's starting already. My nerves are so strained that I think the slightest little thing would start me crying. No, I must be strong; or I'm not Shipuchin! (*Enter Tatiana Shipuchin, twenty-five years old, in a waterproof, carrying an expensive bag.*)

SHIPUCHIN: Bah! Talk of the devil!

TATIANA: Darling! (*Runs to her husband. A long kiss.*)

SHIPUCHIN: Why, we were just talking about you. (*Looks at his watch.*)

TATIANA (*breathlessly*): Lonely? Quite well? I haven't been home yet—came straight here from the station. I must tell you, lots and lots—I can't keep it—I won't take off my waterproof—I shall only be a minute. (*To Hirin.*) Good morning, Mr. Hirin. (*To Shipuchin.*) Everything all right at home?

SHIPUCHIN : Everything. Why, you've grown stouter in the last week and prettier. Well, how did it go off ?

TATIANA : Excellently. Mama and Kate send you their love. Basil sends you a kiss. (*Kisses him.*) Aunt sends you a pot of jam, and they're all angry that you don't write. Zena sends you a kiss. (*Kisses him.*) Oh, if you only knew what happened ! What do you think ? It's all strange to me, even to tell it. What do you think happened ?—But I can see from your eyes that you're not glad to see me.

SHIPUCHIN : Just the contrary, darling ! (*Kisses her. Hirin coughs angrily.*)

TATIANA (*sighs*) : Oh, poor Kate, poor Kate ! I'm so sorry, so sorry for her !

SHIPUCHIN : Darling, we have a jubilee to-day, and at any moment a deputation may come from the managers, and you're not dressed.

TATIANA : Really, a jubilee ! I congratulate you, gentlemen, I wish you—then there'll be a meeting to-day and a dinner. I love that ! Do you remember that fine address you wrote so long ago for the managers ? Will they read it to you to-day ? (*Hirin coughs angrily.*)

SHIPUCHIN (*confused*) : Darling, one doesn't speak of that—Really, you're going home, eh ?

TATIANA : Immediately, immediately. I can tell you in an instant, and then go. I'll tell you all about it, right from the beginning. Well, when you saw me off, I was sitting, you remember, side by side with that big woman. I began to read ; I don't like conversations in a railway-carriage. For three stations I read and didn't speak to her or anybody. Well, evening came on and you know gloomy thoughts like that always disappear. Opposite me sat a young man, nothing particular to look at, not ugly, dark—Well, we commenced to talk. Then a sailor arrived and some student or other. (*Smiles.*) I told them I wasn't married. How they looked after me ! We chatted right up to midnight, the dark young man told awfully funny stories and the sailor sang all the time. My sides ached with laughing. And when the sailor—oh ! those sailors !—when the sailor found out by accident that my name was Tatiana, what do you think he sang ? (*Sings bass.*) “ Onegin, conceal it I cannot, how madly I love fair Tatiana ! ” (*Giggles. Hirin coughs angrily.*)

SHIPUCHIN : But, Tanyusha, we're disturbing Mr. Hirin. Go home, darling, and afterwards—

TATIANA : Never mind, never mind, let him listen too. It's very interesting ; I'm just finishing. At the station, Sereja came to meet me. She had brought some young man, an inspector of taxes, I think, nothing particular to look at, very nice, especially the eyes—Sereja introduced him and we all three went off together. The weather was wonderful—— (*Voices off* : “ You mustn't ! You mustn't ! What do you want ? ” *Enter Mrs. Merchutkin, old, in a cloak.*)

MERCHUTKIN (*at the door, fanning herself*) : What are you stopping me for ? I must go myself ! (*Enters ; to Shipuchin.*) Allow me to introduce myself, your excellency, I am the wife of Mr. Merchutkin.

SHIPUCHIN : What can I do for you ?

MERCHUTKIN : Please listen, your excellency ; my husband was ill for five months and while he was lying at home getting better, they dismissed him without any reason, your excellency, and when I went for his salary, please listen, they had taken a quarter off his salary. “ Why ? ” I asked them. “ He's been borrowing from the fund,” they told me, “ and other people guaranteed him.” How can that be ? He can't take anything without

my consent ! They mustn't do it, your excellency ! I'm a poor woman, and live by lodgers. I'm a weak, defenceless woman—everybody insults me, and I never hear a kind word from anybody.

SHIPUCHIN : Permit me. (*Takes her application and reads it, standing.*)

TATIANA (*to Hirin*) : But I must begin at the beginning. Suddenly last week I got a letter from Mama. She wrote that a certain Grendelevski had proposed to my sister Kate. An excellent, modest young man, but without any means and with no particular position. And apparently, just imagine, Kate was attracted by him. What was to be done ? Mama wrote to me to come at once and use my influence over my sister.

HIRIN (*roughly*) : Excuse me, you're disturbing me ! You and Mama and Kate—here am I disturbed and I don't understand anything.

TATIANA : There's seriousness ! Why are you so bad-tempered to-day ? You're in love ? (*Smiles.*)

SHIPUCHIN (*to Merchutkin*) : Excuse me, what is all this about ? I don't understand.

TATIANA : In love ? Aha ! He blushed !

SHIPUCHIN (*to his wife*) : Tanyusha darling, just go into the office for half a minute. I'll come immediately.

TATIANA : Very well, dear. (*Exit.*)

SHIPUCHIN : I don't understand. You've evidently made a mistake, Madame. Your application does not concern us at all. Just give yourself the trouble to apply to the government department in which your husband worked.

MERCHUTKIN : Kind sir, I have been there already five months, and they won't take in the application. I nearly went out of my head, but luckily my son-in-law Boris advised me to come to you. "Mama," he said, "apply to Mr. Shipuchin ; he's an influential man and can do anything." Help me, your excellency !

SHIPUCHIN : We can't do anything for you, Mrs. Merchutkin. Do you understand—your husband, as far as I can judge, served in the Army Medical Department, but this is a perfectly private commercial establishment ; this is a bank. Surely you understand ?

MERCHUTKIN : Your excellency, I have a doctor's certificate about my husband's illness. Here it is, please look at it——

SHIPUCHIN (*irritably*) : Certainly ; I believe you ; but, once again, this does not concern us. (*Off, Tatiana's laugh, followed by male laughter.*)

SHIPUCHIN (*looking through the door*) : She's disturbing the clerks out there. (*To Merchutkin.*) It's curious ; it's quite ridiculous. Does your husband really not know where you should apply ?

MERCHUTKIN : Your excellency, I must tell you, he knows nothing ! He keeps on saying, " It's not your business ; go away ! " That's all !

SHIPUCHIN : Once again, Madame—Your husband served in the Army Medical Department, and this is a bank, a private commercial establishment.

MERCHUTKIN : Oh, yes, yes, yes, I understand, kind sir. In that case, your excellency, tell them to give me just a little. I'm quite willing not to take it all at once.

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs*) : Ugh !

HIRIN : Mr. Shipuchin, I shall never finish the report like this.

SHIPUCHIN : One moment ! (*To Merchutkin.*) I can't explain it to you, you see. Now please understand that to come to us with an application like this is as strange as to apply for a divorce,

say, at a chemist's or an assay-office. (*A knock at the door, and Tatiana's voice*: "Andrew, may I come in?")

SHIPUCHIN (*calls out*): Wait a second, darling; one second! (*To Merchutkin.*) They didn't pay you, but what have we got to do with it? Besides, Madame, we have a jubilee to-day and we're busy—and at any moment someone might come—Excuse me.

MERCHUTKIN: Your excellency, take pity on me, an orphan. I am a weak, defenceless woman. I'm worried to death. What with law-cases with the lodgers and trouble on account of my husband and running about with the housework, and then my son-in-law still without a position——

SHIPUCHIN: Mrs. Merchutkin, I—no, excuse me, I can't talk to you! My head's quite dizzy. You're disturbing us, and wasting our time for nothing. (*Sighs; aside.*) I know what'll stop her, or I'm not Shipuchin! (*To Hirin.*) Mr. Hirin! Please explain to Mrs. Merchutkin. (*Waves his hand, and goes out.*)

HIRIN (*approaches her roughly*): What can I do for you?

MERCHUTKIN: I am a weak, defenceless woman.

Perhaps I look strong, but if you come to examine me I've not got a single healthy vein in me ! I can hardly stand on my legs, and my appetite's quite gone. This morning I drank my coffee without any pleasure.

HIRIN : I ask you, what can I do for you ?

MERCHUTKIN : Kind sir, tell them to give me just a little, and let the rest wait a few months.

HIRIN : It seems to me, you were told in plain language—this is a bank !

MERCHUTKIN : Yes, yes ; and if it's needed I can produce a medical certificate.

HIRIN : What have you got on your shoulders, a head, or what ?

MERCHUTKIN : Dear gentleman, I'm only asking for my legal rights. I don't want anything of anybody else's.

HIRIN : I ask you, Madame, what have you got on your shoulders, a head, or what ? Oh, Lord ! I've no time to talk to you. I'm busy. (*Points to the door.*) Please !

MERCHUTKIN (*surprised*) : And the money ?

HIRIN : What it comes to is this—you haven't got a head on your shoulders, but—— (*Raps his finger on the table, and then on his forehead.*)

MERCHUTKIN (*watching him*): What! Oh, that won't do! That won't do! Do that to your own wife! You don't do that to me!

HIRIN (*angrily ; shouting*): Get out of it!

MERCHUTKIN: That won't do! That won't do! I'm not afraid of you! We've seen your sort before! Creature!

HIRIN (*shouting*): I don't think in all my life I ever saw anything so repugnant. Ugh! It's going to my head! (*Breathes with difficulty.*) I'll tell you again! Are you listening? If you don't go away from here, you old witch, I'll grind you to powder! I've got such a character, that I could make a cripple of you for life! I can commit a crime!

MERCHUTKIN: "The dog barks, the wind blows it away." I'm not frightened. We've seen your sort before.

HIRIN (*in despair*): I can't look at her! I feel ill! I can't! (*Goes to table and sits down.*) They fill the bank with women—I can't write the report. I can't!

MERCHUTKIN: I don't want anything of anybody else's, I only want my legal rights. Oh, you shameless man! To sit here in slippers! You yokel! (*Enter Shipuchin, followed by Tatiana.*)

TATIANA : In the evening we went to Berejnitski's.

Kate was wearing a blue foulard frock, a little décolleté, and she had her hair done very high. I combed her myself. And the way she was dressed and had her hair done, well, it was simply enchanting——

SHIPUCHIN (*with a headache*) : Yes, yes, enchanting——
—They might be here at any moment.

MERCHUTKIN : Your excellency !

SHIPUCHIN (*dejected*) : What is it ? What do you want ?

MERCHUTKIN (*pointing to Hirin*) : Your excellency, that man, that man there, he tapped his finger on his forehead and then on the table ! You told him to look after my business, and he makes fun of every word. I'm a weak, defenceless woman——

SHIPUCHIN : Very well, Madame, I'm considering it. I will take measures. Go away now. Afterwards—— (*Aside.*) My gout's beginning.

HIRIN (*quietly to Shipuchin*) : Mr. Shipuchin, tell them to send for the porter, and let her be thrown out by the scruff of the neck.

SHIPUCHIN (*frightened*) : No, no ! She'd start to scream, and there are a lot of people in the house.

MERCHUTKIN : Your excellency !

HIRIN (*in a mournful voice*) : And I've got to write the report ! I haven't time ! (*Returns to the table.*) I can't !

MERCHUTKIN : Your excellency, when can I have it ? I need the money to-day.

SHIPUCHIN (*aside, angrily*) : Re—mark—ab—ly horrible woman ! (*Softly, to her.*) Madame, I've told you already. This is a bank, a private, commercial establishment.

MERCHUTKIN : Be kind to me, your excellency ; be a father to me ! If the medical certificate isn't enough, I can produce a certificate from the police. Tell them to give me the money.

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs heavily*) : Ugh !

TATIANA (*to Merchutkin*) : My dear lady, you've been told that you have made a mistake. What a woman you are, to be sure !

MERCHUTKIN : Beautiful lady, nobody cares about me. I've only one thing left, to eat and drink, and to-day I drank my coffee without any pleasure.

SHIPUCHIN (*feebly*) : How much do you want ?

MERCHUTKIN : Twenty-four roubles, thirty-six kopecks.

SHIPUCHIN : Very well. (*Takes twenty-five roubles from his pocket-book and gives them to her.*) There's twenty-five roubles for you. Take them and—go away ! (*Hirin coughs angrily.*)

MERCHUTKIN : I most humbly thank you, your excellency.

TATIANA (*sits beside her husband*) : It's time for me to go home. (*Looks at her watch.*) But I haven't finished yet ; I'll finish in a moment and go. What do you think happened ? What do you think ? Well, in the evening we went to Berejnitski's. It wasn't anything particular ; it was jolly, but not specially. Of course, Kate's admirer, Grendelevski, was there. I spoke to Kate, and cried, and persuaded her, and in the evening she had an explanation with Grendelevski and refused him. Well, I thought, everything is in order, things couldn't be better ; I had quieted Mama, saved Kate, and now I could be easy. What do you think ? Just before supper we were walking with Kate in the avenue, and suddenly—(*Rises*)—suddenly we heard a shot ! No I can't speak about it in cold blood ! (*Fans herself with her handkerchief.*) No, I can't !

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs*) : Ugh !

TATIANA (*weeps*): We ran to the summer-house, and there, there lay poor Grendelevski with a pistol in his hand.

SHIPUCHIN: No, I can't stand it! I can't stand it!
(*To Merchutkin.*) What do you want now?

MERCHUTKIN: Your excellency, couldn't my husband take up his old post again?

TATIANA (*weeps*): He had shot himself right by the heart—just there—Kate fainted, poor girl, and he himself was terribly frightened. He lay there and—and asked us to send for a doctor. The doctor soon came—and saved the unlucky fellow.

MERCHUTKIN: Your excellency, couldn't my husband take up his old post again?

SHIPUCHIN: No, I can't stand it. (*Weeps.*) I can't stand it. (*Stretches out his hands to Hirin in despair.*) Drive her out! Drive her out! Please!

HIRIN (*advances on Tatiana*): Get out of it!

SHIPUCHIN: Not her—that one—that awful one—
(*Points to Merchutkin*)—that one——

HIRIN (*misunderstands; to Tatiana*): Get out of it!
(*Stamps his feet.*) Go away!

TATIANA: What? What's the matter with you?
Have you gone mad?

SHIPUCHIN : This is awful ! I'm a miserable man !

Drive her out ! Drive her out !

HIRIN (*to Tatiana*) : Out of it ! I'll cripple you !

I'll smash you ! I'll commit a crime !

TATIANA (*chased by Hirin*) : How dare you ! You impudent man ! Andrew ! Help ! Andrew !

(*Begins to scream.*)

SHIPUCHIN (*running after them*) : Stop ! Please !

Be quiet ! Have mercy on me !

HIRIN (*chasing Merchutkin*) : Get out of it ! Catch her ! Hit her ! Cut her up !

SHIPUCHIN : Stop ! Please ! I beg you !

MERCHUTKIN : Dear lady ; oh, dear lady ! (*Begins to scream.*) Dear lady !

TATIANA : Help ! Help ! Oh, Oh ! I feel ill ! I feel ill ! (*Jumps on a chair, then drops on the sofa and moans.*)

HIRIN (*chasing Merchutkin*) : Catch her ! Hit her ! Cut her up !

MERCHUTKIN : Oh, oh, dear lady ! It's all going dark. Oh ! (*Falls senseless in Shipuchin's arms. A knock at the door and a voice : "The Deputation."*)

SHIPUCHIN : Deputation — reputation — occupation——

HIRIN (*stamping his feet*) : Out of it ! Oh, hell !
(*Tucking up his sleeves.*) Give me her ! I can commit a crime. (*Enter deputation of five persons, all in frock-coats. One carries a velvet-bound address and another the cup. The rest of the staff stand at the door of the office. Tatiana on the sofa, and Merchutkin in Shipuchin's arms, both groan softly.*)

A MANAGER (*reads loudly*) : Esteemed and beloved Mr. Shipuchin, casting a retrospective regard upon the past of our financial establishment and turning an abstract glance upon the history of its gradual development, we receive in the highest degree a pleasurable sensation. It is true that in the earliest period of its existence, the small dimensions of its original capital, the absence of any important operations and the general indefiniteness of its position furnished a cause for Hamlet's question, "To be or not to be," and at one moment there were even voices which advocated the advantage of the entire closure of the bank. Then you were placed at the head of the establishment ! Your knowledge, energy, and innate tact have been the cause of its extraordinary success and its present remarkably

flourishing condition. The reputation of the bank—(*Coughs*)—the reputation of the bank——
MERCHUTKIN (*groans*) : Oh ! Oh !

TATIANA : Water, water !

MANAGER (*continues*) : The reputation—(*Coughs*)—
the reputation of the bank has been brought by
you to such a height that our establishment may
to-day well rival the very best foreign establish-
ments——

SHIPUCHIN : Deputation — reputation — occupa-
tion——

MANAGER (*continues in confusion*) : Casting then an
objective glance upon the present, we, esteemed
and beloved Mr. Shipuchin—Perhaps afterwards
—Better afterwards. (*Exit, with staff.*)

(CURTAIN)

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

By LÉSYA UKRÁINKA

CHARACTERS

ELEAZAR

CAPTIVES

LEVITES

PROPHETS

OVERSEERS

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

(A wide plain. The red sunset turns the waters of the Euphrates to blood. Scattered on the plain are seen the tents of the Hebrew captives. Naked children seek shells in the mud and gather brushwood for the fires. Weary women, mostly old, in rags, are busied preparing supper, each at her own hearth, for the men that have just returned from the town after their toil and are sitting silently under the willows near the water. A little farther off, also under the willows, stand two groups, the Levites and the prophets. On the willows, over the prophets' heads, harps hang ; quivering from time to time, they jingle in the evening wind. Far away are seen the walls and towers of Babylon and sometimes there comes the noise of the city.)

A WOMAN (at her fire) : Husband, come to supper.
(A man, still young, leaves a group and silently sits down.)

WOMAN : Why dost not eat bread ? (*The man is silent.*) Is it bitter ? There is nought to be done, poor thing, thou must eat.

THE MAN (*mumbling like an old man*) : I cannot eat.

WOMAN : Misery ! Hast no teeth ? Where——

MAN : There ! (*Points to Babylon.*)

WOMAN : Misery, misery, misery !

AN OLD MAN (*approaches an old woman sitting by the extinguished fire of another hearth, motionless, her head bowed down*) : Give me supper ! (*The woman is silent and motionless.*) Why hast not prepared it ? (*The woman is silent.*) Why hast ashes on thy hair ? (*The woman is silent, and bows still lower.*) Where is our daughter ?

THE OLD WOMAN : There ! (*Points to Babylon and pours ashes upon her head.*)

OLD MAN : Adonai ! (*Tears his garments and falls down. At a third fire sit only men, mostly old. A woman approaches timidly ; ragged children hang at her garments.*)

THE WOMAN : My fathers, pardon that I ask you ; have ye not seen my husband ?

AN OLD MAN : How is he called ?

THE WOMAN : Ebenezer of Ossia.

ANOTHER OLD MAN : Was he so called before thou wert a widow ?

THE WOMAN : What sayest thou ?

A THIRD OLD MAN : Do not kill thyself ! Foes do not torment the dead.

THE WOMAN : What shall I do, miserable, with my little children ?

THE CHILDREN : Mother, mother, mother !

A MAD WOMAN (*wandering among the fires*) : Happy the womb that did not bear ; happy the breast that gave not suck. Hey ! rejoice not, Babylonian woman ! Hey ! be not glad, mother of vipers' sons !

A GIRL (*whispers to her companion, pointing at the mad woman*) : 'Tis from the time her child was killed in Jerusalem.

COMPANION : How terrible !

GIRL : And I saw it with my own eyes, how the soldier seized her boy by his feet and struck at——

COMPANION : Be silent !

THE LEVITES (*under the willows*) : For our fathers' sin the Lord took from us the temple ; for our ancestors' dishonour He took away His church.

And now, as a spendthrift's children, innocent we expiate our fathers' debt.

THE PROPHETS : Jerusalem smote us with stones, and for it the wrath of the Lord smote her. The daughter of Zion despised us, and for it the son of Baal subdued her.

FIRST LEVITE (*to another*) : Why hast not been at prayers ?

SECOND LEVITE : The master sent me to the reckonings. The workmen from Haram are being paid for their labour at the king's palace.

FIRST LEVITE : Couldst not find one of the scribes to take thy place ?

SECOND LEVITE : Service, brother ! The master says no men are so skilled at reckoning as the Hebrews.

FIRST LEVITE : True.

SECOND LEVITE (*aside to him*) : For my good help the chief gave me this ring.

FIRST LEVITE : Glory to the Lord, that He hath distinguished His people by wisdom above the nations of all the world. (*Aside.*) Is there no need of another to help ? (*They whisper.*)

A SAMARIAN PROPHET : Thus spake the Lord : On Garisim I have builded an abode, on its summit I

made Mine altar, but ye forsook it and knew not the house of My glory, as the foolish bibbing son knoweth not his father's abode and wandereth in outer darkness, a butt for strangers' children.

A JEWISH PROPHET: Thus spake the Lord: In Jerusalem I made Mine abode among the people, that, as bees come together to one hive, to one queen, so would ye come together unto Me, to the only Temple; but, as a wild swarm, ye flew away, and for it I sent evil hornets against you.

SAMARIAN PROPHET: The lion of Judah ravished Israel and dispersed his sheep.

JEWISH PROPHET: Saul's descendants are fit to be keepers of flocks, but not of the people.

SAMARIAN PROPHET: The Lord of Israel shall reach thee, and through me. (*Raises his staff against the Jewish Prophet.*)

JEWISH PROPHET: Lord, remember Thy servant David. (*Raises a stone to cast at the Samarian Prophet. Eleazar, a young prophet and singer, just come from Babylon, throws himself between the two.*)

ELEAZAR: Refrain! Cover not with shame the names of Israel and Judah.

SAMARIAN PROPHET : Ah ! is it thou, prophet of shame ? And how hast thou glorified Israel and Judah ?

JEWISH PROPHET : Vile serpent, why camest from that nest ? There is thy God and thy people, begone and glorify them !

FIRST LEVITE : May the Lord vomit thee out of His mouth, may thy name disappear as spittle ! (*The people gather round.*)

SECOND LEVITE (*catching a harp from the willows*) : I will break this cursed vessel.

ELEAZAR (*catching his hand*) : Touch not my harp, for it is innocent of my sins ! Curse me, if thou thinkest I am worthy, but curse not the holy harp.

THIRD LEVITE : And how has it sanctified itself ?

ELEAZAR : That never from the first rang a string insincerely.

A BOY : Aha ! Therefore thou didst hang it there.

ELEAZAR (*to the Boy, sadly*) : Why, youth, sayest thou so ?

BOY : Pretend not thou dost not understand !

AN OLD MAN : This youth told thee, Eleazar, what thy conscience would have told thee—but a mute cannot speak.

A MAN : And it is a vanity to talk to the deaf. (*A child stretches out its arms to the harp.*)

THE CHILD : Uncle, give me the toy.

FIRST MOTHER : I told thee, dare not to come to this man.

AN OLD WOMAN (*to a girl standing near*) : I see there is no more shame in Israel, when a girl stands uncovered and looks upon a traitor.

THE GIRL : But I——

FIRST WOMAN : See, poor thing, it is a great woe when one cursed by God steals a girl's heart.

THE GIRL : If he be cursed, I also curse him. (*Veils herself and goes away.*)

ELEAZAR (*to all*) : Fathers and brothers, mothers and sisters, since when is it a custom among us to condemn without judging ? Truly, clearly tell me, why am I become as a leper among you ?

THE OLD MAN : Thou becamest leprous in Babylon, singing for money in the courts to the sons of Baal.

ELEAZAR : Are ye not all gathered here in Babylon for labour ?

FIRST MAN : Labourers do not serve Moloch.

ELEAZAR : Whom then do their arms and vessels serve ? Have they not built such an abode for Moloch, as never had our Lord in Jerusalem ?

FIRST PROPHET : Taunt not captives with their slavery !

ELEAZAR : Am I not a captive ? Why curse ye me for my forced labour ?

SECOND PROPHET : The cord, the spade, the plough and axe in men's hands are men's slaves ; but the word in a prophet's mouth must serve God only, and none other.

THE OLD MAN : Yet wilt thou ask for judgment, Eleazar ?

ELEAZAR : I will, though the judgment end with stones. The Lord liveth ! Ye must judge by truth ; an unjust curse shall turn against you.

THE OLD MAN : Let us hear him. Let it not be said we forsook truth on the ruins of Jerusalem. Tell us what constrained thee to sell the word.

ELEAZAR : That none bought my hands. My father did not teach me to labour, and weak my mother bred me. Though the harp obeys my hands, nor plough nor axe obeys them. I fell under a burden, and the overseer drove me from the labour.

THE OLD MAN : Let then thy father and mother feed thee, who have not taught thee to earn bread.

ELEAZAR : In Jerusalem I earned honourably by the means they taught me, and here too—but the bread burns that my father brings from Babylon ; hard it is to eat from a father's slavery.

FIRST LEVITE : Not only bread thy father brings, but also golden rings.

ELEAZAR (*to all*) : Teach this Levite that gold burns, and not only shines.

FIRST LEVITE (*slyly*) : Why does thy father's work burn so ?

ELEAZAR : Am I judged here or my father ? Bring then all fathers to judgment, that for their family lose their souls.

FIRST LEVITE : Why didst not cry to the nation to feed thee with the bread wherewith it feeds Levites and cripples ?

ELEAZAR : I am not Levite nor cripple.

A LITTLE BOY (*to his father*) : Daddy, give me bread !

THE FATHER : I have none, my son.

A MAN : Dost see ? He heard talk of bread and eating, and says too, "Give me bread."

ELEAZAR : Rightly says the boy. He answered for me better than I could know. Ye all heard. While in Israel they speak thus, Eleazar will not share bread with Levites and cripples. He that has bread, let him give to the child ; I will take stones from the captives. He that has fish, let him feed the children, and give me a viper that drinks blood from the heart. I shall take it and bear it with me into the courts ; it will give sting to my words and its hissing they will hear in Babylon.

A YOUTH : Much wilt thou earn for such songs in Babylon ! Surely less than thou hast earned for the hymns of Zion.

ELEAZAR : Unwisely, boy, hast spoken. I sang them not hymns of Zion. The hymn of Zion, of all songs the ornament, was as a bride in Jerusalem, as a wife in the holy city ; here it were as a concubine, for who taketh a captive as a lawful wife ? (*The people sigh. Eleazar holds his peace and bows his head.*)

A MAN : Why didst not sing the songs of captivity ? Why hast not poured the bitter tears of slavery ? The cold drop pierces the stone,

why would not hot tears touch even the wicked heart ?

ELEAZAR : The Lord set pride in my soul. Never have I wept before strangers.

A MAN : Pride befits not slaves.

FIRST PROPHET : The horn of pride in thee rose above grief and holy love !

ELEAZAR : Measure not the measureless with the endless, for thou wilt not see what will come of it.

A YOUTH : Eloquent is Eleazar among the captives ! Why in the Babylonian courts do his love and grief and pride hold their peace ? Surely the place is too small ?

ELEAZAR : And didst thou think it were enough ?

O youth, I have measured all those Babylonian courts and know their size. It happened I crossed that court where our people is building a tower for Moloch. I stopped and gazed at it. The marble is white as bones in the field, the porphyry grey as shed blood, the gold shines as a bright fire. It stands unfinished, like ruins ; the cries of our conquerors are heard, and the groans of our people. I know not how, with a great voice I shouted over the whole place, " Jerusalem ! " With a cry answered the captives from

the wall, and with laughter answered the guards. "Is that ruin called in any wise, has that desert still a name?" I went away to the market where they sell captives into slavery. There a rich merchant was choosing the most lovely captives.

WOMEN : Misery, misery, misery !

ELEAZAR : I said, "Think, lord, these girls have fathers and brothers. Were thy sister or daughter taken captive, would the foe sell her?" He answered, "'Tis the fate of captives." I went farther and saw a small, weak slave, and a tall, strong Babylonian loaded him with wares, as a mule, and drove him with a stick. I cried, "Stay ! To torment such a small boy !" "For this he is a slave," he answered, arrogant. "And were thy son sold," said I, "he too would be a slave?" "Surely ; not otherwise," said the rich man, and laughed aloud, "but I do not sell my sons, and thine, thou seest, I buy." Who, what will touch such hearts? Once only with my songs I got a tear from a stranger ; the king himself wept at the end of Saul and Jonathan's death.

A VOICE FROM THE PEOPLE : Long live the merciful king ! In him only is our hope.

ELEAZAR : The merciful king wished to reward me generously.

FIRST LEVITE : What gave he thee, Eleazar ?

ELEAZAR : He gave me a chamber in his palace and Jewish captives, as many as I would. From that moment I cursed the songs that get tears from conquerors ; they are the tears of the Nile's crocodiles.

THE YOUTH : Thou shouldst have sung them of the fame of our ancestors, that they might know the strength of our people.

ELEAZAR : I sang.

THE YOUTH : And what ? (*Eleazar is silent.*)

THE OLD MAN : Say, Eleazar, how the strangers heard the songs of fame.

ELEAZAR (*slowly*) : One of them whistled and, smiling, shook his head. Another said, " Not all that is true." A third bade me join the military singers ; and all, one after the other, said, " Is there only that in the world which is in Jerusalem ? Knowest thou no songs of Edom, of Misraim ? Was not the fame of Amalek, Ammon and Amareus as the past fame of Israel ? "

FIRST PROPHET : O Lord, chastise the hostile lips with the dumbness of death.

ELEAZAR : I began to sing them of Edom, of Misraim, of foreign speeches in a foreign speech. They heard how treacherous Edom's crooked sword broke against Ashur's armour ; how Amalek, Ammon and Amareus from ravishers became slaves ; how Misraim, master of half the world, once the lord of the tribes of Israel, had to submit to the eternal might ; how horse and rider fell into the sea, and all the Pharaoh's might, whenas was voided the abhorred house of toil and the cursed place of slavery was devastated.

THE YOUTH : And what did the listeners ?

ELEAZAR : There were those who paled.

SECOND PROPHET : May they grow pale and cold for ever !

THE YOUTH : Why didst not say that also for these will come a day of judgment ?

ELEAZAR : For that word there is no room in Babylon ! To-day I sang them of Ophir, Sidon and Tyre, their power and wisdom and treasures, as are not and never will be in the Babylonian treasuries.

FIRST LEVITE : Didst gain much for this song ?

ELEAZAR : Thinkest, the treasures of Canaan ? See,
I have bread for this day's supper.

THE YOUTH : Surely, for songs that praised Babylon's power thou hast earned more than one golden ring ?

ELEAZAR : The vile speaks only with poison, but poison hurts not every man. When heardest me sing songs of the Babylonian glory and might ? (*The youth is silent and ashamed.*) Thou hast judged thyself by thy silence.

THE OLD MAN : Eleazar, it may be thy songs are good in Babylon, but Misraim and Edom and all their tongues will not bring Palestine to mind and awake the thought of Jerusalem.

ELEAZAR : Is there already need to bring it to our minds ?

THE OLD MAN : Not to us, but to those that among foes have used to speak the foreign speech

ELEAZAR : How will they understand the inborn song ? How sing it in a foreign speech ?

THE OLD MAN : With thy foreign words thou wilt forget to say, " Jerusalem ! " (*Eleazar stands thoughtfully. His hand begins to touch the strings of his harp, and his voice sounds, neither singing, nor wailing, as of one who sleeps.*)

ELEAZAR : My right hand was strong ; who could overcome it ? Did I then say to myself : “ Happy am I ; I have my right arm ” ? Spake I ever thus : “ Right arm, know thou art mine ! ” But the evil foe wounded my hand and cut off my right arm. Whom shall I overcome now ? Who will not overcome me ? Day and night I say to myself, “ O misery, where is my hand ? ” I look upon my shoulder and weep, “ Right arm, how forget thee ? ” (*He quietly touches the strings. The people weep.*)

My father had a rich vineyard, my mother a green garden. I walked in it, plucked the berries and trampled the leaves with my feet. An evil neighbour set fire to our vineyard and wasted the green garden. The vine was burned, the berries dropped and its glorious beauty fell to ashes. If I find beneath my feet, be it only one leaf, I shall press it to my heart, Dear brothers, say, has none of you, be it only one leaf from my vine ? (*The strings sound still more sadly, and the weeping becomes louder.*)

I dreamed a dread dream—who shall divine it ? 'Twas as if I fell into the hands of the enemies. What have they done to me, my terrible enemies ?

My arms still are mighty, my legs still are strong, my eyes still are clear, and my body is not hurt. Only my tongue, my tongue was for their vengeance. I wished to speak a word ; I wished to lift up my voice. But my lips spake with blood and cried with silence. (*A long pause. The harp falls from Eleazar's hands and the sigh of its strings dies away. The people's cries cease abruptly. Silence. He speaks with respect, but firmly and distinctly.*) Fathers and brothers, mothers and sisters ! I wait for a stone or a word from you. (*Silence.*) What curse is more awful than silence ?

THE OLD MAN : We do not curse thee, Eleazar.

THE YOUTH : Forgive me my hard word, brother.

ELEAZAR : Ye do not curse me. I forgive all your words. But still I am cursed with the dreadful curse of blood. The blood of our fathers, shed in vain for our lost liberty, weighs upon my head and yours, and bows down our forehead to the earth, to the stone that the hand of my people hurled not against me. A man's son fell and cut himself on a sharp stone ; in despair he rent his garments of honour and strewed ashes of disgrace upon his head. O, as the temple I fell, as Jerusalem we fell all, and, as hard as it is to

rebuild our temple, so hard it is for us to rise out of the dust of slavery's dishonour. Shame fell upon our arms that rose not to take the lives of us conquered, but rose to labour for the enemies. Leprosy covered the bodies of the girls of Zion, that they drowned not themselves in the Euphrates, but went to entertain the sons of lasciviousness and nurse the fruit of their shame. And shame covered my lips that from hunger these lips grew not still, but spake the strange speech in those cursed courts where all songs sound—and only that which bursts from the heart must die. Infamy oppresses us worse than chains, it bites worse than iron fetters. To suffer chains is inhuman shame, to forget them unbroken yet greater ignominy. Two paths we have, death or disgrace, till we find a way to Jerusalem. Brothers, let us look for a way to the temple as the gazelle seeks water in the desert, that the mighty foe may not say, "Now have I slain Israel; it is dead!" And ere we find it, let us fight for our life as the wounded badger in the hunt; let it not be said among men, "The Lord of Israel fell asleep in Heaven." O Babylon, too early is it to rejoice! Still our

harps sound among the willows, still tears flow into the Babylonian rivers, still the daughter of Zion burns with shame, still the lion of Judah roars with fury. The Lord liveth, my soul liveth, Israel liveth, even in Babylon !

THE VOICE OF AN OVERSEER FROM THE CAMP : To the tents, Israel ; the night cometh. (*The people separate and go to their tents. On the distant towers are seen the Babylonian magicians, foretelling from the stars. The camp grows still. From Babylon faintly comes the sound of revels. The solemn night trembles over the captive camp and Babylon. Here and there quicken the overseers' fires. Silence.*)

(CURTAIN)

PRINTED BY
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

29

A D 2.9.





Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Dec. 2006

Preservation Technologies

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111



OGBBS BROTHERS
LIBRARY BINDING CO. INC
ST. AUGUSTINE, FLA.

SEP

'88

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00025302072

